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"Men all, my lords," said Peter, "and I but a tub-thumping jackass whose piety is nothing but an asset to the smug propriety of the firm that employs me."

That was the worst part of the coil; the whole thing made him so sick that he felt like a whiting in a trammel net with the crabs feeding on him.

It was a relief when the hairy seaman, after a preliminary shifting on his beam-ends and a furtive spitting on his palm, began to roll up the aisle between the rows of lounging men. In a flash of half-effective memory Peter recalled the man's face; a Bodinar, of Brixham, with a dim background of brain and daring to his family name. Then the piano player bobbed his head, nodded emphatically three times, flashed his eyes cunningly and announced an extra:

"Mr. Simon Bodinar in the favourite Devonshire song 'Billy boy, Billy.'"

Swinging his body as though he were heaving at the windlass, the singer began to roar in a hoarse voice that suggested some hawser grown weed-hung and barnacle-coated in deep-sea waters that only the lead-line knows. The chorus "Billy, beuoy, Billy," was bellowed by the audience with the rolling undertone of a ground-swell on a pebble-ridge.

"Whur'v'ee bin to all the day, Billy, beuoy, Billy?
Whur'v'ee bin to all the day, Billy, beuoy, Billy?
I've bin yur, I've bin thur, I've bin ivery other whur,
A-luking for a young thing to taake 'er from 'er Mam-my.

"Can 'er baake and can 'er brew, Billy, beuoy, Billy?
Can 'er maake a Hirish stew, Billy, beuoy, Billy?
'Er can baake, 'er can brew, 'er can maake a Hirish stew,
But 'er be a young thing to taake 'er from 'er Mam-my.

"How awld be 'er then, Billy, beuoy, Billy?
How awld be 'er then, Billy, beuoy, Billy?
Twaice six, twaice zebben, twaice twenty and eleben,
Yet 'er be a young thing to taake 'er from 'er Mam-my."

Mr. Bodinar snuffed up the incense of admiration at

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the close of the song with his sensitive, pock-marked nose, like any wide-nostrilled Chinese idol. Then there came a sailors' hornpipe, danced solemnly, deftly, pat to the echo of its rub-a-dub-dub, with an upper body stiff like a mainmast and lower limbs that seemed but mere ligaments. It was a picture in dumb show of the zest of the sailor's craft, a picture dating from the time when seamanship meant waiting on the pleasure of wind and tide, dancing to the tune they played, not, as to-day, forging ahead in the teeth of their defiance.

When at ten o'clock, the company stampeded out of the door like a herd of steers, Peter made a sign to the man to stay behind. Yet, as they stood watching the attendant extinguish the lights in the cavernous place, he seemed to find a difficulty in opening the conversation, till Bodinar passed the back of his hand so suggestively over his mouth that it almost seemed to hide a smile. And this smile was something quite different from the grin with which he had hailed the roars of applause. At sight of it Peter Westlake remembered another fact about the Bodinars; a singular bit of sea-daring by which one of the brothers had saved a vessel by opening casks of oil round a foundering craft. In short, there was an atmosphere of brain about the chap that made even his silence impressive. The sensation emboldened the little man and he plunged:

"That was a queer yarn you were spinning on the quay this afternoon," he began. "I suppose you don't mind telling it over again? I've got a friend upstairs I should like to hear what you have to say. And I rather fancy you've stuck pretty close to me the whole day."

"Closer than a barnacle, when there's aught to gain," said the seaman in a voice that seemed rusty from disuse.

"Come upstairs," said Peter, briskly leading the way down the passage to his private rooms which adjoined the mission hall. As he opened the door of his study another recollection of the Bodinars came to him; one not so savoury, but more mysterious. For there are queer customs, dating back many centuries, in all old fishing centres. Yet, after all, this Bodinar might have no connection with this particular superstition.

The room they entered looked out on the river, with windows that faced seawards down the Narrows of the Dart. The lights in the houses across the river joined the twinkling stars in one unbroken wall of bright points. Through the room the lapping of the tide in the reaches of the estuary sounded like a confidential voice.

Bodinar sleeked his hair down with both hands in deference to the tall man who leant against the mantelpiece watching Westlake and his prize with a quizzical smile. Then the seaman sat down at the green-covered table with his peaked cap carefully stowed beneath him. There was a strange quality in his eyes, for whole vistas opened downwards into them, as though one were peering into the jade depths of some ocean world.

It was almost a relief when he glanced down and drew a dirty chamois bag from his trouser pocket.

" Anybody outside ? " asked he, listening with his head on one side.

Getting up, he opened the door and walked down the passage and back, as though to reconnoitre. He had a footstep that one couldn't forget, for one foot, apparently the left, halted and dragged with the sucking undertone of a wave receding on pebbles, while the other swung clear to a steady purpose : slow sheep and swift panther yoked in unequal fellowship.

" Rum thing ? " asked Peter, raising his eyebrows at the tall man who stood, match in hand, in act to light his pipe. The latter had the knowing air of a man who can read a woman or a horse thief.

Down the passage on the return journey came the queer footstep ; dot, drawl ; dot, drawl ; and then two lines of a doggerel catch :

" Off Diego Ramirez, where the Ildefonsos roar,
There's gold, there's gold, there's gold galore."

His voice had a break in it, being guttural in the lower notes, and squawking, parrot-like, in the upper, with nothing to link the two.

"Sang it all the afternoon at intervals," said Peter Westlake. "Come over, I should say, on the look-out for a wealthy yacht owner. Cunning devils, all the Bodinars."

He was about to finish the sentence with more precise information, but desisted. For somehow he wanted to let the fellow make a good impression on Captain Knyvett. He wouldn't spoil his market by mentioning the shady side of the Bodinar talents. Meanwhile Knyvett pulled at his pipe till the light burnt fire red at the breath from his leathery lips.

"You know, sir," said the seaman to Peter, "what I told you about this morning. Well, there 'tis."

Between his fingers, hairy like a spider's legs, something glinted. No glow of sovereign or doubloon had it, only a glittering point here and there that caught the light from the hanging lamp. Over and over again he rolled the pieces, like a man trying to wipe up a stain, while the other two watched him, eyes a-gog. For it was gold dust that Bodinar handled thus amorously.

"There's tanks of it, where that come from, gents," said he. "I'm the only man that knows of it, but I can put my finger on it like *that*."

He dashed a spatulate black-rimmed thumb on the table and puffed noisily at his pipe.

"It's a dead cert, gents, a dead cert."

He leant back in his chair with the wearied air of a man who is labouring an obvious point. Then he lifted up his head like a dog that howls and began:

"Off Diego Ramirez, where the Ildefonsos roar,
There's gold, there's gold, there's gold galore.

That's it, gents. And it's poetry, too. Made it myself. Runs in a family like warts, poetry does. For my father was the same before me and made rhymes as clear as a bell."

He had drunk just enough to turn the footlights on, so to speak. Nor was Simon Bodinar cut off from one of the most abiding sources of joy, a sense of the greatness of his own powers.

Then, inspiration welling within, he tried a new tune :

" Down, down, down, at the bottom of the sea,
Where the dead men crawl upon hand and knee."

Across the heaving surface of the river outside lay a streak of light that showed the rise and fall of its unquiet breast. Beyond the light could be distinguished the blackness of hills girdling the Basin where the riding lights of the anchored vessels hung like fireflies caught in the meshes of an unseen net.

Suddenly the steam-ferry bustled across the tideway with the hiss of a saw and the men roused themselves from the half-dream into which they had fallen.

" Diego Ramirez," said Captain Knyvett ; " that's the Horn district."

" Aye, it's the Horn, the——"

" Yes," said Captain Knyvett, twinkling, " the English language does stand in need of trochees. But," he added, changing his tone, " you'll have to prove your credentials, Bodinar, up to the hilt, if you expect us to act on what you're telling us."

" Sir, I ask for nothing better. And as for going out to look for the place where this come from, that's your own look-out. Only, if you don't, you'll be making a big mistake, the biggest of your lives."

" If there's going to be any going after gold," said Peter, rising and going to the window, " I'm out of it. It's not my affair."

" You're not in with this at all, then, Peter ? " asked Captain Knyvett, raising his eyebrows banteringly. He had noticed that the hand which the small man lifted to his pipe was shaking and knew that one of the strongest forces in the world was working in the room that night. " Yet 'twas you who first cottoned to the yarn."

" I can't be in with it," said Mr. Westlake curtly. " I'm a poor man. You'll want money for a mad-cap scheme like *that*."

He lost himself in long, long dreams as he fixed his gaze firmly on an anchor ring clamped to the paving of the quay outside. The voices in the room seemed to come to him from a far distance, but insistently.

"Let's get it all plain and square," said Captain Knyvett, getting up and taking down one of the many blue back charts that hung on the wall. It was a chart of the Cape Horn district that he flung on the table.

Peter Westlake drew nearer, irresistibly fascinated, while the seaman began to hum once more:

> "Off Diego Ramirez, where the Ildefonsos roar,
> There's gold, there's gold, there's gold galore.

"There she is, there she is, the old b——," he shouted, running his fingers along to the south of that hell of seamen, the terrible Diego Ramirez islands.

"Do you know, mate," said Peter, "that chanty of yours gets on my nerves? Hang the thing! Jiggety-jig, jiggety-jig, I shall have it in my head all night."

"Morn and night, pit-mirk and bright noon," said Bodinar solemnly. "It runs in my head, too. For it's true."

"Sailor's yarn!"

"That's right, mister. Sailor's yarn it is. But sometimes they'm true. And who are you, a sky-pilot, a devil-dodger, to be a judge of sailors' yarns?"

"You say," said Peter sharply, "that the *Anaconda*, a coasting vessel, was built for a firm of traders in Coronel by Hamblen Brothers of this town."

He nodded towards the quay.

"That you took her out as skipper, to the west coast of South America through the Magellan Straits and that being driven by stress of weather up Smyth's Channel, you there came across a certain cove which you can find again."

"That's so. Straight on the knocker," said Bodinar cheerfully, reaching over to the grate and knocking out the ashes from his pipe on the hob of it. "That's so. See here," he said, stretching out a great hand towards Captain Knyvett as the latter rested his hands on the table watching both chart and man, his bushy eyebrows drawn close together in cogitation. "You think I'm lying. Well, if I am, you can go and find out. Hamblen Brothers o' Dartmouth have got their ship-building shop about a hundred yards from this very window. You can go and ask 'em whether they built the *Anaconda* and I took her out through the Straits."

"Let's have the full story," said Mr. Westlake, coming out of his day-dream.

"Ah, Peter, Peter, you've singed your wings," cried Captain Knyvett, subsiding into his chair with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Look ye here, gents. I took that there cock-boat, the *Anaconda*, a twelve-ton steamship, right out to the Canaries, past the Line, down the Roaring Forties, past Cape Virgin, up the Straits to Punta Arenas. Now, you're seaman enough to know what that means. Talk o' Franky Drake! Faugh! there wasn't another chap in Dartmouth, no, nor yet in Devon, no, nor yet in England, but me that would have crossed the Pond in that cock-boat. 'Twas taking a man's life in his hands to do it. And Hamblen Brothers, what built her, knowed it. Says they to me: 'Bodinar, there's not another man we'd ask to do it, but you.' Lord, 'twas the maddest sort of a voyage. To cross the Pond in a twelve-tonner. D'you know how we did it?" he shouted.

"She was an accommodation vessel, fitted with sails to her and we sailed, thirteen days, to the Canaries. Then we caught up the Trades, sailing, man, sailing, steamed the doldrums and right away down, saving coal with sails when the wind was fair. That was seamanship, that was, if you like."

"It was," said Captain Billy.

"Thank ye, mister," said Bodinar, holding out a paw. "Shake."

"They may talk," he went on, "o' Franky Drake. And he must ha' been a seaman, too, for the man as could—and they say he did—*sail* up the Magellan Straits, must ha' been a great man. But he didn't cross the Pond in a twelve-ton steamer. No, nor he didn't use sails on a steamboat." The ex-skipper of the *Anaconda* loomed, titanic, before their eyes.

"And the crew!" he exclaimed. "Look at the engineer. 'Man,' says he to me, afore ever we slipped the Narrows out there, 'Man,' says he to me, 'am I a slave or not?' 'No,' said I, 'but you'd better go below and bank the fires all the same.' 'Oh,' says he, haughty like, 'as long as you know I'm not a slave!' And goes below with that. And that's the sort o' seaman *he* was. And the crew! Naught but Brixham trawlers out of work. Did they know what they were in for? No: not one. What did they know about South America and the Horn? Never heard of it, not one of 'em. Going off for a longish sort of a voyage, that's the way o' it to them. And one shipped for cook. Couldn't make three-decker, no, nor duff. Hadn't fried naught but fish before. And with that sort of tool, I crossed the Atlantic."

From the estuary outside had sailed Norseman and pirate, Crusader and Elizabethan sea-dog; Drake, Davis and Gilbert knew the Narrows well. Drummed down the reaches to the noise of sackbut and psaltery they had sailed many a time. Bodinar had weighed anchor to the noise of a steam-hooter or two and the grumbling of an engineer half seas over, yet the rapture of mastery was his. He lay back, hands crossed, and basked in his own sunshine.

"And the gold, man?" said Captain Billy, quietly. "The gold?"

"Ay, the gold. That's knocking on the knocker, that is. There you go for it, lickety-split. That's it, lickety-split."

He paused, tasting the syllables of his ridiculous rhyme. Then, with an entire change of front, turned from truculence to solemnity.

Somehow or another Mr. Westlake's cupboard had been made to yield spirituous liquor. Captain Knyvett shoved a glass of it towards him.

"Thank 'ee, mister, thank 'ee," said Simon, his hand clasping the stem of the rummer. Then his full lips clung passionately to the brim of it for a second.

"See us creeping along, creeping along, day after day," he continued, " up the narrow channels of a land-locked sea, cropeying round corners, for you couldn't tell where you'd fetch up upon t'other side. Steep cliffs everywhere, with trees to the water's edge, evergreen, kind o' fir trees, overhanging so you could steam beneath the branches of 'em. That's Smyth's Channel, and up above the trees, bare screes, and up above that, snow in the hollows, thin scattered snow showing the bare rock between the scutter of it. And a grey cloud that never lifted overhead and the grey sea beneath. And rain and hail and sleet and snow. Snow on the fir-trees like white on an old man's beard."

He had fallen into the voice of a dreamer fathoms deep in sleep.

" And anchoring night by night, and by day columns of smoke in one cove or t'other. Long columns, like hawse pipes in the air. Natives' fires, the Alaculofs, and then the poles of a wigwam, maybe. And steamer-ducks upon the water with a noise of scores upon scores of paddle-wheels a-going. To hit 'em, you must shoot with rifles. Feathers so thick against the cold that nothing but rifle shot will bring 'em down. Same, they tell me, all along there, with bird or beast."

He was jotting down impressions now, throwing them out like a man spitting out fragments of bone from a mouth over-full.

" And then—— 'Twas a dead dull hour with a bit o' the brighter dulness that comes at the close of day. Like a looking-glass the sea and deep water under the very cliffs. Lord-a-Lord, there must ha' been wild doings there back hundreds upon hundreds of years agone, for the cliffs be mountain tops and the bottoms of 'em go down, down, fathoms down. Sixty fathoms down is nothing thereabouts.

" And then—— Tall cliffs, black, up to the snow line, straight up."

He held up his hands like a Moslem in the pose of prayer.

" A narrow neck it was between 'em and so close across that you could have held a pole across the waist of the ship and the pole would ha' touched a rock on each side. Pinched through, we did, though, a biscuit's throw from they bare, black rocks, a-seeking good anchorage. Dark it was there and bitter chill between them, and beyond a land-locked cove. Smooth, clear water, lead-line going all the time. And trees, the pitch-pine sort that burns better than bunkers, to the edge and through the woods run a stream, two hundred yards or so wide." He sat resting arms on knees gazing into a picture.

"And half a mile inland a waterfall between the trees, like a white line, the thin streak of it. And round the outfall of the river—sand."

He drew a long breath.

"Stepped into it from the boat, foot going slush into it. Low tide, sands all bare and shining. Up against the lead of the clouds and the looking-glass water, the yellow of it. Foot went in deep; squelch, I can mind the feel of it against my sea-boots.

"'Hullo,' says the mate. Great hulking chap, Primitive Methody at that—*and* a teetotaller, 'Hullo, rum stuff!'

"But I'd seen enough. He hadn't the brain to know. *I* had. Up I went under the trees to the side; foot sunk into moss deep down, rotten trees like touchwood and pulling up the moss by the roots, points of gold.

"That's it—gold. And as the tide went out the rocks stood up out of yellow sands. And the queer light over it all. Then the mate, the hulking Methody, bathes his face and neck in the cold stream. Face swelled up, so's his own mother wouldn't ha' knowed 'en. That's the way in those parts. The water strikes home and to wash all over in the ice-cold of it would be death. Ice-cold from the beginning of the world. But that son of a gun was too big a fool to know it."

He sank into quiet while Knyvett's mind had gone in quest of all he could remember of that strange land, where man is held up by the forces of nature, a pigmy in the hand of a giant. Spaniard, Englishman and Dutchman, sealers or prospectors they had sailed these waters of the Horn century after century, leaving little trace save grazing sheep and a dying race of natives.

And Knyvett felt hungry for these virgin seas, untamable by man.

The skipper's manner had changed again. He was business-like, as brisk as a sharp-faced landlady totting up the items of a bill.

"Had a kerosene tin filled with the stuff," he said. "Fourteen pounds to a kerosene tin. Kept it knocking about on the wheelhouse a day or two, so's the hulking fools I'd got aboard shouldn't get wind of it. Then I sneaked it down to my cabin. Kicked overboard, thought they, if they thought at all. Ah, yes! kicked overboard!"

He grinned, wriggled his legs ecstatically and beat with his heels on the ground. Then he was suddenly quiet again.

"That tin, gents, went on to Coronel, for the *Anaconda* fetched up there at last. Then I nosed about at the ship-chandler's and found they'd got a chemist sort of a chap there. Pycroft, by the name of Reuben, he was—Reuben Pycroft. He'd got a mercury washer for testing gold. And to him I handed over that tin o' sand."

"Well?"

The listeners bent forward.

"Two and a half ounces of gold was what he brought me, besides what he'd sneaked. There's some of it. Over £12 yield. 'Richest pay-dirt in the world,' says he to me."

Mr. Bodinar leant back, sighed, crossed his hands as one who turns his face to the wall, having done with earthly things.

Then he blinked an eyelid lazily at the two men.

"And I," continued he, "saw the very spot on the chart over there just now." He nodded towards the blue back on the table. "I've got the latitude and longitude. 'Tisn't in the log, though. Not in the log of the *Anaconda*."

He hurled his sentences like an imp throwing stones at a grazing sheep.

"And you aren't going to point it out?" asked Peter Westlake foolishly.

"Not for Joe!" said he gaily. "But set me aboard a tug and I'll put there. Take you to the spot. And—to show there's no jiggery-pokery with me—I'll plank down the latitude and longitude and name of inner and outer cove and send 'em in a sealed envelope to any bank you like to name."

"And the profits for you? What share?" asked Knyvett.

"One-half the net yield."

"One-third to you," said Knyvett curtly, "and the rest to the adventurers whom you guide. That's fair. We find the capital for ship, wages and equipment."

"But——" began Mr. Westlake.

"All right, Peter," snapped Captain Knyvett. "This is my deal."

"Excuse me, gents both, it's mine," said Bodinar. "You can't move without me. You might prospect in that channel for twenty years without me and not hit on that cove. I come over here to-day and lights upon you, Captain Knyvett, the owner of the yacht *Pendragon*, now anchored in the Basin out yonder. That's what I come for. Thinks I, here's a lot of yachtsmen and that, moneyed gents, about the harbour now. Let's see what they say to this. And I say one-half to me and my cousin Sam Hicks, that'll go with me. Him and me can work together. I know 'en well."

"Who is he?" asked Knyvett.

"A good steady chap. Ship's carpenter by trade and handy. He'll come."

"One-third to you and Hicks, if we find he's suitable," repeated Knyvett.

"So long, gents," said Bodinar, rising. "This deal's off."

He picked up his hat, brushed it elaborately with the sleeve of his coat and tied the neck of the chamois leather bag. This he did slowly and yet more slowly, tying a sailor's knot, untying it and then repeating the operation.

"I say, Billy," protested Peter.

"Wait a bit Peter," said the captain in a low voice.

Bodinar had already reached the door, when he paused, hesitated, and came back. He had concluded to throw his cousin overboard.

"One-third to me, and what share to Hicks that you find conformable," he said at last.

"Right," said Knyvett, "see you to-morrow, skipper."

The sea was making now and from where they stood on the steps of the house they could hear the soft hiss of its on-flow filling the air as with the rush of a creature myriad-winged. Overhead a gibbous moon, swollen in the face by reason of the mist wreaths, cast aureoles of burnished copper across the flocks of racing clouds. Along the pavement of the quay sounded Bodinar's step, growing fainter in the distance; dot, crawl; dot, crawl. Then silence.

Round the corner, beneath the overhanging houses of the ancient Butter-walk, Bodinar stopped, rubbed the back of his head, pressed his hand over the reddish stubble of his chin.

"Ho!" grunted he, "Ho! Ha!" Plainly he derived much satisfaction from the repetition of these syllables. "And now," said he to himself, "for a bit of roast duck and a glass of rum and water. Wonder if she's got any cold potatoes, for roast duck cries for potatoes most so much as it does for onions, and eating roast duck without onion's like kissing a man without a beard, as the maid said when she hugged the wrong chap."

Before the red-curtained windows of the lodging house he whistled shrilly. There were three steps below the level of the street leading into the matted passage of it and a richly nutritious air ascended into the street from the adjacent atmosphere. Bodinar snuffed zestfully and disappeared. His footstep was more peculiar than ever on a stairway.

"What d'you make of it?" said Peter Westlake as they returned to the fire.

"Three facts I've got out of him unbeknownst to himself," said Captain Knyvett, holding up one finger after another. "Fact one, he sees visions and dreams dreams; an imaginative devil. Fact two, he likes a drop. Fact three, he caves in when he's hard pressed. But all the same, there may be something in it. There's a thousand miles of gold-bearing strata in the Horn district and the out-crop is at sea level in places, or below it. That's why I first listened to the man. But they haven't washed for it in the West and especially in the Northwest. Know anything about this Bodinar chap ? "

" Well, yes. Or rather about the Bodinars."

" What then ? Out with it, man."

" They're West Cornish, I believe. At least the name is. And there was a Bodinar that married a Crowte. And the Crowtes go back three or four generations as —don't laugh, Knyvett—witches, fortune-tellers, what you will. One of these women was the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter and able to overlook—or cure overlooking, I don't know which."

" An atmosphere of trickery and deceit, anyway," said Captain Knyvett, knitting his brow. " Who goes to 'em ? "

" Everybody on the sly. Women, ship captains, smack owners. Anyone with a bigger venture on hand than ordinary. And only a few generations, remember, would take you back to the witches who sold a wind."

" So that's Bodinar's source."

" May not be. For there are several brothers. But one married a Crowte."

" Who has a devil or a familiar," said Knyvett, laughing. " Well, *courage, mon ami, le diable est mort*. But what's the matter with you ? For something's up, or I'm a Dutchman."

Peter Westlake answered by another question.

" Knyvett," said he, " you must once or twice have come down to the bed-rock of things ? "

" Once or twice," answered Knyvett quietly. " And so that's happened to you, has it ? Well, I'm glad of it. But, how does it take you ? "

" I can't stand any more of this poll-parroting about, painting mere manners on real flesh and blood. What's the odds of a cuss-word or two, or a drinking bout now and again, if the root of the matter's in you ? "

"I wondered how long you'd stick it," said Knyvett. "For after all, it's cheek, doing what you've been doing."

"So it is, Knyvett, so it is. Dead sick of it I am. I must let out—or bust, I tell you. Faith, I've got a regular hunger upon me, I have. Red meat's what I must have. All my days I've fed upon mush."

"What, Peter, you? Old 'Hold the Fort'?"

"Don't chaff, Billy. I can't stand it. Good Lord, you ought to understand. You cut everything not so long ago and became a wandering Jew. Why shouldn't I? Tell me that, Billy?"

"And yet you're getting up in the firm. You're through your articles and on your way to a double-belled front door. And this place, this mission hall, is always packed."

"Do you think I'd have stayed so long if it wasn't? But I don't believe in any of it. That's a fact. I've got to quit. I tell you I'm like a man that's sat by a beastly gas-fire all his life. I want to go away and light up a big bonfire; to smell the blessed smoke of it. Lord, I can't explain——"

"You needn't," said Captain Knyvett quietly. "It's just growing pains, Peter."

"All right. I've got to grow then," puffed Peter angrily. "And I've sent in my checks anyway. I've only three more weeks of bondage to folios. But there's another reason why I must go."

"Ah!"

"Anne Hereford's coming back to stay with her sister."

The little man was pacing up and down; he had gone to pieces everywhere, as Knyvett observed, for even the heels of his shoes were trodden down. Heart gone, pluck gone; that was Knyvett's verdict. The latter began to feel that if Bodinar's gold was but the glitter of a phantom Pactolus, it had come in the nick of time.

"But," said he quietly, "if Anne Hereford's coming, that appears all the more reason why you should stay."

"That shows how little you know," said Peter testily. He was an unimportant cog in the legal machinery of Dartmouth, and Knyvett was a man of wealth and position, but Peter Westlake simply lacked "the social sense." It was one of his greatest charms.

"Very likely," acquiesced Captain Knyvett. "But how are the Herefords? It was to see them that I put in to-day."

"Sara," said Peter, "is quieter than ever. Her husband's new book is out and nobody wants to mention it to her. And her father looks—well-fed."

"The old situation then," said Captain Knyvett.

"And did you expect a new one, then?" snarled Peter.

"When it comes I want to be ready for it, Peter. That's all," said Knyvett.

And being ready for a new situation in the Hereford family, was, for the present, the epitome of Captain Billy's life. Being a sailorman he understood to the full the duty of standing-by.

"Meanwhile," said he, "what do you say to going with Bodinar and me up Smyth's Channel prospecting for gold?"

CHAPTER II

CHRYSOSTOM: IN THIS THE READER IS PRESENTED WITH THE KEY OF THE HOUSE

CAPTAIN KNYVETT stood on the terrace at Craneham, gazing into the Herefords' dining-room.

At this height the sea sounded like the wind playing through ruined walls, now thin and clear like the humming of an unseen harp; now close and luring like the note of some old-world pagan. For the house rose like a white cliff out of a belt of pines and cedars. And beyond it, still higher up the hillside, wound the white road, topped at the summit by telegraph poles that stood out against the greyness of the heaving sea. High over the front of the house, against the blue-grey storm clouds that scudded before the west wind, circled a solitary gull, the last rays of daylight shining on its strong wings.

Through the long, green-toned room into which Captain Knyvett was staring, light poured from the frilled edges of a silk-shaded lamp in a network of yellow rays; it was a sort of luminous spider's web. In the heart of it sat an old man. Tall, wiry, with his skin fretted to the worn beauty of an ancient ivory, with his flowing white beard and silver mane, he only needed a trident to look like a figure of Neptune.

The open case of antiques over which he was bending contained heavy rings of mossy iron and bronze, mediæval charms against demons, lamps from Rome, scarabs from Egypt and finally a crystal ball for scrying which he held in his hand for some time in order to enjoy the sensation of cumulative cold that such a globe can impart. He held it now until a distinct sensation of chill crept up his two middle fingers. Then his face expressed satisfaction, for Mr. Hereford was a connoisseur in sensation. He had, besides, at this moment other sources of satisfaction, for the lamp beneath which he sat was shaded to the precise tone of yellow which he held to be the true saffron loved of old in Isles of Greece. He had, in fact, babbled much of Hymen to the astonished shop-girl from whom he bought it.

But, alas, in this world no state of satisfaction is abiding: in fingering the next treasure in the case a trifling contretemps occurred, as the watcher on the terrace perceived. The ring the old man was handling slipped from his fingers, bounded across the carpet and clicked along the polished edge of the floor. Then followed a grovelling search for it which entailed much snuffing up of carpet fluff and dust which again induced philosophic musing. As thus: how much of human progress would be lost were man but to return to his primitive method of progression, all-fours.

Vin Hereford rubbed the tip of his nose irritably, to get rid of the fluff and philosophy. The conditions of the house were restless this afternoon. Doors had banged, maids had scurried, worst of all, his daughter Sara, the anchor of his peace, had been exhibiting signs of restlessness. In short, Mr. Hereford felt like a cat who smells valerian; as he himself would have put it, his vibrations were perturbed. The whole of Craneham was full of means whereby he might vibrate aright, from the housemaid to the tint of his bed curtains, for when his vibrations were wrong, everyone had what may be plainly called and without euphemism, a devil of a time.

He was understood to be collecting materials for a work on Charms and Amulets; in reality he was just an old child playing with toys. As he had been all his life, from the time that, a painter of sorts in the Académie Délécluze in Paris, he haunted the Quarter in long-haired garb, through the intermediate stage of a lecturer on Æsthetics in England, up to the present competence whereby he enjoyed, like the lilies of the field, a modicum of prosperity without toiling or spinning.

This competence had been gained, not by any exertions of his own, for he had never been a good enough workman to earn a pound a week, but by the human accretions he had managed to gather round him. For his life had been a process of rolling and, contrary to the proverb, of moss gathering. Round him like an old tree he had gathered warm covering and every stage in his career was marked by some human being drawn into his sphere for the purpose of contributing to his comfort.

First came his wife. Without her he would have starved, for she scribbled magazine tales, patched, cooked, fought the duns, paid for the lodgings, and never let him know that she was his first line of defence against poverty. Then came his two daughters. One of these, Sara, the elder, had proved a very profitable investment, for her he had married to Archer Bellew, a son-in-law of his own choosing, and when she became an heiress in a small way by inheriting Craneham from her mother's sister, he practically acquired the place, as he had always annexed everything desirable. He had even, as a final corner stone to the edifice of his comfort, abducted a cook from Paris, for Elizabeth, busy at this moment in the back regions of Craneham, had, for the love of little Madame Hereford, followed the family to England from the Pension in the Rue de Milan where the Herefords had lived through their worst times. A very lucky parasite, in fact, was old Vin Hereford, one whose human relationships had been, materially speaking, his salvation. And about his salvation in another sense, who knows?

Anyway he had one plea; that through him many human creatures had been afforded a priceless opportunity of practising the virtues, both major and minor.

Reflecting that he had played the eavesdropper long enough, Mr. Knyvett crunched across the gravel and up the steps. On the square turn of the oak stairs stood Sara Bellew, prinking her face sideways at the sound of the visitor's footsteps. He wondered what it was in her greeting that struck a sudden chill in him, for it was as full of pleasure as a welcome could possibly be.

"Why, Billy, dear old Billy-Doux," she cried, hurrying down with both hands outstretched, "is that you? We never knew that the *Pendragon* was in."

"It wasn't till yesterday," he said.

Of Knyvett people often thought, "What a queer-looking chap," till he spoke—and then they found that he possessed a most insidious charm, a mellow voice that was power and tenderness combined. His wide forehead showed up the fluted appearance of the bony structure of the temples where the wrinkles had weathered into the dry furrows that come from exposure to sea and sun. He wore his beard goatee, and more folks than one had wondered what would happen to Captain Billy's notions if that beard were to be clipped. For when its wearer was in a tight place a tug at it had often brought a shower of inspiration. And he had been in so many tight places that his face was like a palimpsest scrawled over with many things. Over its hollow-cheeked, Don Quixote lines the sun had placed a bloom of tan; in his muddy grey eyes the sea had put just a glint of blue. And that gleam of blue had been well earned, for he was familiar with the note made by breakers on a cliff, with the hiss of surf on a lee shore.

Sara was a tall woman with a square head crowned by the black parted hair above a low broad forehead that one sees more often in Southern than in English women. Her type is found constantly in Provence. Dark eyes, deep wells of brooding, were set in a dusky face that had already something of the mellow tone of a sun-baked wall. Her hair, buoyant and crisp, encircled her head with the curves first caught by a Roman chisel. A still woman, she moved gracefully, dressed to-night in a rather sumptuous dress of old gold. The material of which it was made seemed brocade in the evening light, but its richness was, in fact, merely due to braid. And in any case, it was at least five years old, which facts are here writ parable-wise, for Sara Bellew had learnt the whole duty of womanhood, which is to make the best of things. And since she could not afford brocade, she took braid and therewith tried to be content.

"Well, Sara, how goes it ?" he asked, eyeing her as jealously as a man may after a long absence.

"Just a little older, Billy," she laughed, nervously putting a hand to her cheek under his scrutiny.

"And just a little dearer," he said. But that, of course, was to himself.

"But especially well to-day," she continued. "For we are expecting Anne at any moment."

She walked out of the front door, a certain nervousness still continuing. And at Craneham the house was at all times but an annex to the open air. Mr. Knyvett followed her to the garden seat that faced the great cedars.

"Anne coming back ?" he said, "but surely she isn't through with her course yet ?"

Mr. Hereford's unmarried daughter was on the way to a doctor's degree.

"No," hesitated Sara, "but she had to come back for a time all the same."

"Why ?"

"Well, she has to wait till we can get together enough money for her to go on. When Aunt Priscilla died and left me Craneham, we all thought how rich we were, but there was very little ready money and the place is expensive to keep up."

Mr. Knyvett nodded. He knew how to give due weight to Mr. Hereford's expensive mania for collecting antiques. He remembered with a grin how in the old days Anne used to tamper with the mail by dropping catalogues into the waste paper basket. And Archer Bellew, that rising novelist, might not care to spend on his wife's sister. But here he caught himself up short.

It was singular how little Sara's husband appeared to count in her life. He was constantly absent from Craneham, for which there was doubtless excuse in the fact that the old Hedonist, her father, chose what tune should be played there. He was also apparently often absent from his wife's mind. For which there might also be excuses, only Billy Knyvett had no desire to know them, for there are always some trains of thought that one shies at. Just now his mind was beating up and down, seeking a way for itself.

"Will you let me help with Anne?" he said bluntly.

"With Anne?"

"Let me find the money. Wait a bit! It's a simple enough matter really. I've got plenty to play ducks and drakes with, if I like. In fact, I'm just going to chuck some away in a gold-prospecting scheme, and Anne will be a good investment."

"Oh, Billy, we couldn't."

"Yes, you could. If she were a young man you wouldn't refuse."

"But you can't treat her as if she were."

"Why not? Look here, Sara, just listen to me. I don't ask it for Anne's sake. I want to do it for my own. We've known each other for years. And I've been able to do nothing for you. I want to put what I feel into action. I've stood by and—only felt. There was nothing I could do but feel. Give me my chance, Sara," he pleaded.

He got up, half choked by his inability to catch the gossamer web of his deepest emotions.

But Sara understood. She was—and to it she owed half her charm—one of those people who live vividly in the world of unspoken things, of things unheard, but yet audible.

"I know, Billy, I know," she cried. "But it's the thing that one only feels, that never finds expression,

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that is dearest. Do you know that often when I sit over the piano, I hear a sort of dream-music, a song I shall never play in actual notes? I don't think I would if I could. I want to keep my dream-song unspoilt. Once brought down to earth and played, it would never be so beautiful again. And I feel like that towards you."

"I'm only a man," he said humbly.

But his thought followed hers, quick-winged; how wonderful love might be to many had they never gone through the process of love-making and marriage. That explained a good deal of Sara's married life. Then he returned to his point—with a bludgeon.

"Let Anne judge for herself about this," he said. "That's only fair."

"She would feel just as I do about it."

"Then let her say so. If you are sure about that you needn't hesitate."

"You don't think she would agree with me?"

"No. She has too much sense."

"Billy, how rude you are," she laughed.

Just then from the lane below the house came a shrill cry of "Coo-ee" three times repeated and followed by the gamin whistle that is made by three fingers placed between the teeth, a whistle regardless of Mr. Hereford's nerves.

"That must be Anne," exclaimed Sara and promptly vanished down the green tunnel through the pines, while Mr. Knyvett hurried into the house to soothe the father of the family.

Mr. Hereford's idea of the perfect friend was one who would make himself a mere receptacle for ideas. He therefore received his visitor with affability, for Billy Knyvett perfectly understood that his function was to be a conduit pipe.

"Ah," exclaimed the old man joyously, "that's the way to do it. To come in upon one without fuss. We never knew you were near the place. So very different from Anne. We expected her yesterday, but instead come nothing but wires. In the meanwhile, of course, the house is in an uproar."

There was a silence that could be felt, as a matter of fact, but Mr. Knyvett acquiesced in this observation.

"But what can you expect," said Mr. Hereford, "of a young woman who is learning to inspect meat?"

"Eh?" said Mr. Knyvett, his faculties on the strain from the fact that his ears were listening for the rustle of two petticoats.

"To inspect meat," said Mr. Hereford, raising his voice, "for that is the latest craze of this amazing female. Public health work, they call it, and that means haunting the abattoirs of Liverpool. Faugh!"

"Seems queer," said Knyvett. "But I suppose it's all right. If meat has to be eaten, meat must be inspected."

"But not by a woman," said Mr. Hereford firmly. "I was always against a medical course for Anne, but Sara would not be deterred from allowing it by anything I could say. I always find that when it's a question of herself, Sara yields to me, but when it concerns Anne, she's a nether millstone of obstinacy. She goes her own way then and Anne leads her by the nose. I have known Sara positively violent about letting Anne have her way and implacable to a degree scarcely credible in a gentlewoman."

Old age is loose-mouthed, a revealer of hidden thoughts.

"The only person Sara loves is Anne," continued Mr. Hereford, "and she is doing her best to ruin the girl's life. It is just an instance of what I have always maintained, that a woman should never love. She can't stand so strong a passion. Sara has no particular affection for me and after ten years of marriage she isn't likely to have much left for her husband, yet to both of us she acts ideally. As daughter and wife she is all that a father and husband could desire. She is only unwise where she loves. Never, my dear Knyvett, commit the indiscretion of marrying a woman that loves you. You might as well put your head in a hangman's noose."

"But how," said the practical captain, "are you to get a woman to marry you when she doesn't love you?"

"She'll think she does. That's enough. That's

Nature's way. Love-making is a process of hypnotism, of snake-charming. Once swallowed, the woman recovers a healthy normality. I have often thought of writing a book on the subject. I might have been a second Nordau had I given my mind to science. But I was always too versatile."

Knyvett groaned and in order to cover the noise got up to poke the fire. Here he was shut up with an old man who seemed bent on unlocking all the skeleton cupboards in the Hereford household. It was intolerable to him, this vivisection of his lady's life. But there was no escape.

"Anne was a charming girl," continued old Vin, "the very virginal type of a Botticelli. Tiny neck, delicate head, bird-like ways. Irresistible! Never went anywhere without creeping insidiously into every man's heart. The pathetic little look was enough."

"Wholesome for the men, d'you think?" queried Knyvett. He was not sensitive on the subject of Anne.

"Wholesome is a word that ought to be banished from the vocabulary of a civilised people. It is 'wholesomeness' that has ruined Anglo-Saxon art. Woman is a delicate condiment, a spice, the gift of the High Gods."

He lifted his hand to his skull-cap, while Mr. Knyvett watched the two sisters approaching the house and wondered how Sara stood this sort of thing day after day. For Vin Hereford was one of those terrors who regard the domestic hearthstone as a lecture platform framed for man's convenience by the connivance of the centuries.

"There *is* Anne!" exclaimed Mr. Hereford, at last becoming aware of his surroundings. "Terrible!"

He shuddered slightly as a hearty voice called "Hullo, dad," through the window. Yet there was nothing terrible in the small, trim figure in dark green travelling suit with stout, well-cut shoes that tapped briskly along to the tune of their wearer's sense of happy fitness. With her keen, deep-set grey eyes beneath a forehead crossed with long lines, few but significant, Anne Hereford looked things in the face, both men, women, and facts. She quite obviously weighed, balanced, judged; it was that fact of appraisement, indeed, that removed her very far from the type to which her sister belonged. But the charm of it lay in her fearlessness; if things were not, on the whole, good, they were at any rate capable of being made better. She was, therefore, not reckless, but calm and wise. Billy Knyvett preferred it to the Botticelli virgin.

With a pleasant wind of bustle Anne got herself and her boxes upstairs.

"Now, then," said she, framing her sister's face in her hands as soon as they were alone. "Himm! So that's you, is it? Don't think much of you, then. Peaky, decidedly peaky. And where's Archer?" she asked, turning away to the glass and shaking her head to loosen the hairpins.

Anne was a person not yet starched to buckram; she twitched her toes and raised her eyebrows.

"Archer?" said Sara vaguely. "Oh, Archer's getting local colour, I believe."

Anne looked round at her with mouth slightly open. Her tip-tilted nose rather made for impertinence.

"His last book was rot," said she. "The tone—deplorable."

"So the critics said," agreed Sara.

"You didn't like it, surely?" asked Anne.

"Not at all," answered Sara, opening the wardrobe door placidly. She was an excellent housekeeper and the shelves were tissue-papered and lavendered. In the matter of her husband's book she might have been talking of Chaucer, for all the warmth of her manner.

Suddenly something gave way in her, something cold and congealing.

"Oh," she exclaimed, putting an arm round Anne's camisoled shoulder, "it is good to have you back."

"But you weren't sure of it when you came down to the gate to meet me," said Anne, narrowing eyes at her sister's reflection in the glass.

"I thought you would think it mean of me that I had to bring you back," said Sara slowly, painfully. "I tried hard, Anne, not to have to do it."

"I was a selfish beast to have gone on taking the money."

"Dear, there was plenty till lately."

"Dad," said Anne plainly, "is a costly old ornament. *I* know. But I'm glad in a way to be back. Won't it be fine to kick up my heels in my own pastures."

Sara hesitated. Should she mention Mr. Knyvett's wish to advance the money? But no, it was unthinkable, the mere offer, still less the acceptance of it.

On the landing Anne paused, bright-eyed and mischievous. Leaning over the rail, she contemplated the hall below. It was as silent as the ancestors on the walls. Only the clattering of plates came from behind the baize-covered door that led to the older part of the house.

"Dare I?" said Anne to her sister, putting her head on one side like a bird when he raises a song to the god of raspberries.

The next moment there came a slithering noise of skirts followed by a thud; Anne had slid down the banisters. Demurely Sara followed, wondering why Anne retained the jolly ways of a child—or a man. But she knew, for Anne had been out in the world where one does things. She had not stayed at home listening to the wind in the trees, to the noise made by the footsteps of the future. It was the best thing that Sara had ever done, that sending of Anne into action. Very warm at heart, she followed the girl into the drawing-room, where Mr. Knyvett was still acting as a conduit.

"Harmony," Mr. Hereford was saying with his fingers neatly fitted in the shape of a pointed arch, "harmony is the thing we neglect in modern life. We must not jar, we must vibrate in unison."

He had closed his eyes and was gently swaying to and fro to his own eloquence. Sara, turning James, the fox-terrier, over on his back, rubbed his stomach with her foot, while Anne winked a ribald wink at Mr. Knyvett. Mr. Hereford always spoke in clear, silvery tones, with measured precision, even if he were only discussing the varying richness of his eleven o'clock bowl of broth.

"Let us all be frankly hedonistic. Then the problem of the universe is solved. For if I'm looking after your happiness, while nobody is looking after mine, then one of us is left out in the cold. Whereas if I look after mine, and you look after yours, things are kept in equilibrium."

"Just so," said Anne drily, "that's why I couldn't make out why you didn't want me to go in for medicine."

Mr. Hereford opened his eyes and gazed at her wistfully. "You had," said he, "the wrong idea of your own happiness."

"Then that's where your theory of economics breaks down, Dad. For if everybody is going to interfere with everybody else's theories of happiness, then we shall be all running round after each other's tails, in exactly the same uneconomical way you hate."

"A woman's brain should never concern itself with theories," said he, shifting his ground. "Her life should be like that of a flower. Remember always the line, 'the heart of Being is celestial rest.' And woman is at the heart of Being, her sole duty to give us beautiful children."

"Brainless ?" queried Anne, with raised eyebrows.

"I beg your pardon ?"

"I said, did you want beautiful, but brainless, children, Dad," said Anne, speaking louder. "For that's the sort of babies you get from that kind of woman, the sort that can't think. And the funny thing is that some of us women quite like thinking. It doesn't hurt a bit. And you see, we do feel just a little responsible for things, things in general, you know—babies among other things."

"Ah," said he sorrowfully, "the responsibility for the universe was not invented in my days. It is a distressing thing. It has destroyed home comfort, it has turned Woman into a Medusa, a Fury, a Megæra, a Gorgon."

A flush appeared on his cheeks. Both daughters regarded it with alarm, for a fit of rage might be fatal. But it was Billy who intervened.

"I've no quarrel with the age," said he; "to me it's a jolly good age. And life can't be a bad thing, if seventy years of it produce a William de Morgan."

"It's all hollow, Knyvett, everything's hollow," said the old man, to whom d'Annunzio was the last word in novelists.

"Then I like hollowness," said Knyvett obstinately.

"And that's a lie, you know, old Heart of Oak," whispered Anne as she opened the piano, ran her hands over the keys and presently burst into one of Liza Lehmann's songs. In the light of the room, with Anne's low, caressing voice in his ears, Mr. Hereford was soothed. He had a grudge against life because there were fogs, frosts, darkness and trouble that could not always be avoided. The song ended, he returned to serious matters.

"I hope," said he, "that you will do over the furnishing of your room, Anne. It is barbarous at present. Our rooms, our houses, should be all in one tone. Let there be no mixture of styles, such as we see to-day, of classic and Georgian."

Sara's humour bubbled up; here was she with less than a five-pound note in her pocket till her husband got home. And her own banking account overdrawn, while the old man babbled of art periods.

Anne followed the thought and sitting on the tiger-skin rug, gurgled blissfully.

"Or Edwardian, Dad," said she gently.

He shuddered. "Is there such a style, my dear? But if there were, I am sure Sara would have introduced it here. It is bound to be cheap, and to listen to Sara, one would suppose that cheapness is the one desideratum in life."

"The kitchen pots and pans, Father," said Sara, "*are* Edwardian, else, I'm afraid you wouldn't like your dinner."

Just at that moment the gong sounded from across the hall.

"Good biz," cried Anne, scrambling to her feet.

"Ah," said he, as they crossed the hall, the heels of the women tapping up into the stillness; it was a house of exceedingly lofty rooms. "If only I could induce you to bring back the spit and the joint slowly turned on a jack in front of the fire. The delicate flavour is preserved, the juices are retained. That would make the culinary regions beautiful, a delight to the mind. And Dutch crockery, too, so fitting."

And Sara stands this every night of her life, thought Anne. Then she looked across the table and what she saw on the other's quiet face made her blink. It was not impatience, not boredom, but a wish, a very distinctly expressed wish of something cold and full of hate, something so naked in its intensity that Anne looked at her plate and shivered. Becoming aware that there was something very seriously amiss in this house, she began in the bright light of the well-lit room with its great oil paintings revealing here a limb and there a head out of an expanse of dirty ochre, to feel as if she were in one of those inns which horrify young students of German with their secret staircases and lurking trap-doors.

Then the absurdity struck her and she laughed.

"Sara," said Mr. Hereford, "these stuffed tomatoes have eggs in them again. It should be forced meat. I distinctly said so last Thursday."

"I will tell Elizabeth, father."

Anne rushed to fill the breach.

"Have you tried the new idea, dad, of unfired food ?" she said. "Carrots and nuts shredded and pressed into a paste, you know. It is said to supply the body with the vitality that it wants, that would otherwise be lost in cooking."

"Very interesting indeed. I have heard something of it. You must tell me more."

"For goodness' sake, Anne," said Sara in a low voice, as he turned to help himself to another dish, "don't go upsetting his digestion with raw turnips. I've only just fixed up his proper puddings and soups."

She thought ruefully of the various megrims that her treasure, Elizabeth, had already to satisfy, for when Archer was at home his writing powers had to be stimulated by a suitable diet which varied from caviare to milk puddings, according to the work that was on the stocks.

"But," said Mr. Hereford, "to return to the decorations of your room. I always feel that this wall paper is a mistake. Red is too blatant for a dining-room. It has, I believe, a harmful effect on the digestion. Red dining-rooms have more to do with appendicitis than people suppose. But such a topic to raise! What can I be thinking of?"

And with the air of one who has fallen from grace, he returned to his dinner.

"Oh, oh, oh," said Anne, standing on the terrace outside when the meal was over. "Let me fill my lungs. Billy, do you know there are three hundred and sixty-five evenings in the year and on every one of them Sara talks parlour-talk?"

It was always impossible to mention anything but Mr. Hereford's chosen topics in his presence; his will was a mighty force.

"Ye gods! tell me about the roaring seas of the Horn and what was it—

"'Down, down, down, at the bottom of the sea,
Where the dead men crawl upon hand and knee.'

I want to man the yard-arm, to con the ship, to—to—swarm the mizzenmast."

"So do I," said Knyvett, "but I must bring up my queer fish, Bodinar, to see you."

"And Peter, don't forget him. I'm just craving for Peter."

"And so he is for you. Yet you laugh. You're a fiend, Anne."

"Well, Peter always seems to me like a character in a weak novel that the author couldn't get the hang of nohow."

"That is merely because his poverty puts him in a false position with you. He has stood aloof on purpose."

"And that just shows that he is only looking at my outside and knows nothing about me at all. For if I marry I stand on my own feet. I don't marry for a living. Ring or no ring will make no difference to me in that respect. Shocked, Billy?"

"Not from you, Anne," replied Knyvett, placidly exhaling smoke. "But I want you to oblige me by taking a weight off your sister's shoulders."

"Off Sara's? How?"

"By letting me advance the money needed to enable you to complete your professional training."

"Sara told you?"

He nodded, while she mused, lips pursed.

"It'll be a kindness to me."

"To give you a chance of doing something for Sara," she said bluntly. "Yes, I know. Well, I accept, if you let me pay five per cent. I say five, not four, because I might die before you get your money back."

"Sara," cried Knyvett triumphantly, as she passed the open window of the drawing-room, "I've won. Anne's the business woman of the family."

"You mean she will take money from you?" Her tone was icy.

"Why shouldn't I take it?" exclaimed Anne. "Just because it's a man giving a leg up to a woman. Silly, highfalutin, old-fashioned humbug. Wait until you yourself are put in such a fix that you must take help. See what you'll do then. Why, to refuse is to deny Billy one of the greatest pleasures he'll ever have."

The two dark figures on the terrace, the bright point of Knyvett's cigar, the tall figure inside against the lighted background of the room, Anne's words: of such materials was made the moment that memory registered indelibly in three brains.

CHAPTER III

RUTH AMID THE ALIEN CORN: IN THIS IS ACCOMPLISHED A RESURRECTION

It was nearly midnight when Anne Hereford opened her bedroom door that night. The wind was whistling through every keyhole and the walls of the house were straining like the timbers of a labouring ship. While the flame of her candle flickered in the draught of the passage, she hesitated outside her sister's closed room. The door was so massive, so forbidding in its firm fitting, that she dared not tap at its winking surface.

For Anne knew that she was up against something like a wall in Sara's nature, some strong bar hiding fire and pain. Fresh as she was from the struggle with material facts, the facts of germ and atom, of organ and function, the intangible interactions of character that she felt in this house seemed like furtive footsteps passing to and fro with a whistle of the air as the sound of their going. In the open battle against ignorance and darkness the note was elation, but here one fought in the mist, one knew not what.

As she stood close to his door in a lull of the wind she could hear the steady breathing of the old man's sleep; from her sister's room not a sound.

Then Anne slipped noiselessly down the stairs, her unstockinged feet rising white from the furry tops of her soft slippers. Gently opening the green baize door she peeped into the rear of the house. This action took her back two or three centuries, for at Craneham a late Georgian front had been built on to a Jacobean house that had once been a farm. Here was a second staircase, with plain oak banisters, white-washed walls, and a wide low window half-way up the stairs. Above were white, plastered bedrooms with doors of oak made before the days of the plane. Beneath, the stone-flagged passages led to a raftered kitchen with window seats on each side of the great range where once had stood an open fireplace.

In front of the grate crouched the bent form of an old woman with a high, fluted French cap on her head and a black and white checkered shawl over her curving shoulder-blades. She creaked ominously as she turned, for on the withered frame the buckramed armour of a thick pair of corsets held up the lax yielding of the muscles. The light of a candle cast the hooked nose and nut-cracker jaws in shadow like a wavering interrogation mark on the white side-wall. Gazing into the fire sat Boulou and

Baby, the ancient wizened black cat and her elegant seal-brown Persian daughter, both with profiles as contemptuous as the head of Osiris. Neither the cats nor the old woman moved at Anne's entrance, for the cats were filled with meat and Elizabeth had a rage at heart because Anne, her nursling, had not come to her before.

"So," said she, raising her eyebrows, "so, it is thou. I was on my way to bed."

She yawned ostentatiously. Her mouth was cavernous from the lack of teeth, for she was in deshabille. Then Anne seized her by the shoulders and planted a smacking kiss in the middle of the forehead that was wrinkled like the skin round a parrot's eye.

"Crabs, Elizabeth, crabs! You knew I'd come. But I felt all shivered up the back. That's why I didn't come before."

Her heart smote her for unkindness, for *le bon Dieu* alone knows how long the old woman would have stayed up watching and waiting. Meanwhile Anne was searching for a certain square biscuit tin kept at the back of the corner cupboard by the window. It was so high up on the wall that she had to stand on the sofa to reach it, while Elizabeth watched her with the bright blue eyes that supplied the one unfaded bit of colour in the old face.

"Good," said Anne, dragging off the cover. "So thou didst not omit the preparations, though thou art as sour to-night as Seine water after a flood."

She had fallen into the *tutoyer* familiar to her childhood, for Elizabeth was a Frenchwoman. Then, taking a handful of chestnuts from the tin, she began to place them delicately between the bars of the grate. These chestnuts were always in the tin against her return, for Elizabeth would as soon have thought of taking a bath as of omitting the chestnut rite.

These arrangements made, Anne turned to the parcel she had left on the table and cast about for a knife to cut the string, but Elizabeth forestalled her and fell on the packet tooth and nail.

"Careless!" exclaimed she, "a string is a string and is it not good for another day? Thou wilt come to want through such ways."

Anne was inwardly trembling at the thought of the gift she had brought the old woman. For they were bifurcated garments, these offerings of hers, fleecy, warm, comforting, but with a note of male impropriety about them.

"Oh, so soothing, so comforting," pleaded Anne. "They will be so good for thy rheumatism. Think, try them, see, they fit marvellously well."

She stretched them out against Elizabeth's gaunt figure.

"Bah! little beast," twinkled Elizabeth, who was as pagan a soul as ever crawled. "And what will my guardian angel say? Me, me a virgin of nearly eighty years in these—these! Shameless one, thou wilt come to a bad end. Shall Elizabeth wear a forked garment?"

But her hand was sinking lovingly in the lamblike allure of them. It was irresistible; the corners of her toothless jaws began to mow with pleasure.

"Elizabeth," said Anne, as she gently prodded the chestnuts with a toasting-fork from the stool where she sat between the cats, "don't, I beseech you, stuff tomatoes with eggs again. Dad doesn't like them so."

"Ah, *ce Monsieur!* All the day he think, think, think of himself. And change! *Mon Dieu*, how he does change. You never can tell. It will be eggs with tomatoes next time. And Madame so tired of it all."

"Elizabeth, are things worse than they used to be? Dad was always more or less—so."

"*Sacré nom*, and don't I know it? Have I not served Monsieur's whims for years upon years?"

She outstretched her palms fanwise.

"But what about my sister?"

"It is this way with Madame. She hath nothing, nothing at all for her own heart. *Voyez, chérie*, you do put away fruit conserves and leave them month by month, year by year. Then you look and the fruits are all dried—dust. Fit for nozzing but to sweep away. So it is with Madame. Everything dry, dead, withered, fit to sweep away. No child, no love, no business.

Nozzing. And to think the old Monsieur's thoughts all the day! Chut! over and over again, day by day, week by week, month by month."

"But——"

"*Voyez donc,*" exclaimed Elizabeth, catching up the candle and crossing the kitchen. She touched the corner of the table to steady herself. In the passage she opened a side door and held up her candle.

The two looked into a long room lined with laden book shelves of fumed deal. Gobelin curtains drawn across the windows kept out the night wind. There were white narcissi from France in long glasses on the mantelpiece over which was an oval Bartalozzi print. And on the great writing-table lay the paraphernalia of a writer, ready, waiting, polished and dustless.

"Monsieur Bellew's work room. Always like that for him. Madame puts fresh flowers whether he is away or not. She fails in nozzing. It is always pairfect for him."

Anne's eyes suddenly grew bright as though tears were coming, yet she knew that she had only partially caught the old woman's meaning.

"Yes, Madame leaves nozzing undone. But it is all dead. It is Dutee. Bah! I do loathe the Dutee! Give me love."

With these remarkable sentiments for an ancient virgin, she returned to the kitchen fire.

"For you," she continued, "Madame did not buy market flowers. She go out and pick the little violet for your room, and the primrose just three inches high, for Madame has one thing to love and that is you, the babee. Her *homme à elle*, he is the Dutee, he has the market flowers. But she will never neglect, never waste. Madame Sara rise from the bed of death to do her Dutee. Bah! I spit."

She was fierce, but of a marvellous comprehension. Her eyes were as gimlets, for her heart was passionately Madame's. She had the understanding of perfect love. And if perfect love does not cast out fear, it has at any rate not even a nodding acquaintance with stupidity.

' "Elizabeth," asked Anne, "is there anything worse than estrangement and loneliness ? "

For answer the old woman seized her hand and pulled her towards the door. Opening it, she stood on the threshold. A flagged path lost in the darkness stretched out in front of them. Tiny, mossy crevices filled the interspaces.

"*Ecoutez*," said Elizabeth, holding up the withered forefinger of an ancient beldame, "*Ecoutez donc.*"

Anne listened ; from over the hills came the sound of the sea, a myriad-voiced thing that tore at the gates of silence. It went over the house like a great voice.

They shut the door, struggling with the storm to get it fastened with the massive iron bar that rested on sockets in the wall on each side.

"It cries like that nowadays," said Elizabeth. "I cannot sleep when it calls like that."

"What do you mean ? "

"Troubles like that, they come to Madame." She was trembling very much. "You will stay home a while, won't you, *ma petite ?* Just to cheer Madame ? The house stirs with you in it. And the voices, one does not hear so loud."

Anne was afraid to question further lest she hap on something worse than her fears. She shook herself.

"It's all nonsense. Besides, there's always Billy for a strong tower."

"*Ce cher* Monsieur Knyvett. Ah, yes, he come here, once, twice, thrice a year. He watch ; he wait, and he—hunger. And when he was here last time he come to me and says he :—'Elizabeth, if ever I'm wanted here. If ever there's the littlest thing I can do for Madame, send for me. Promise me you will.' And I did. He give me the place in London where I could always write. For he wander up and down—everywhere. And behind Madame, wherever she is, is Monsieur Billee. But Madame, she know it not."

"But why should she go on like this ? If Archer doesn't care for his home, I'd let out and go. Dad wouldn't really mind, as long as someone gave him money and kept his rooms and meals right. I'd not bear it. Why should she ?"

"*Tiens*," said Elizabeth, "you do not think. The mistress, your mother, was like that. There was not anything for her in the world but—him."

Her voice was indescribably mixed in tenderness and scorn. "She lived for him. And he never knew. He was, the old Monsieur, said she, 'a song bird that must sing in peace.' Never, never, did I see such a thing. I would have turned him up, had he been my man, and made him sing what tunes the *gamins* sing, when they get their whips. But no! he come to Paris to paint. She ill with two children. But he care not.

"But there was worse to follow. Ah, *mon Dieu*, when he took to the life of the fields, to the peasant life, he, the white-handed. We all—he, your mother, you two children and I—we drive up to a great barn place in the land of savages, Cornwall, far, far West. And oh, the grey, grey sea. And there in great cold rooms in mid-winter we live. No meat; bloodless food for us, said he. And you, *pauvres enfants*, to be fed on oats, the food of the donkeys. And not a word did she say. Only smuggled in the food for the delicate bellies of the little ones. Then he went off speaking, lecturing, on what? Who knows? And she would say, 'Ah, Elizabeth, he will come back with money for us all.'"

"And did he ?"

"Did he ? He comes back, not like others by day, but in the darkness of a winter night. It seemed always winter then. I can see her now with a petticoat over her head in her red gown and me with the teeth chattering to get that accursed door open."

"But the money ?"

"He had brought one piece of gold and two unpaid bills. One piece of gold after six months' work! And thy mother she put an arm round him and said, 'Ah, dearest, but thou hast struggled for us.' And then put him to bed with a hot brick that I had to heat."

"But how strange to think of dad even trying to earn."

"He grows old," said Elizabeth cynically, "and to grow old is to grow wicked. And her mother left him, her biggest child, to Madame, thy sister. That is the way of it. And Madame will never turn back from the task. But she sees clear and that makes it hard. Her mother never did and that made it easy. Or perhaps he did love—her. They had memories of the time when he adored. That is the way of it with married folks. They have memories of the good time."

Anne was lost in a dream; in every house the tone is set by one character, the strongest, or at any rate, the most rapacious. Old Hereford's claims were incessant, on youth, on vitality, on gaiety. He had laughed joyously at the prospect of having another younger life to yield its warmth and zest to him. That was the reason of his jealousy of her career. Anne's temper rose in revolt, for herself and her sister.

"But Sara has her memories, too, the memories of married folk that thou hast just mentioned, Elizabeth."

There was silence for a minute, then the old woman said, as though groping for a meaning:

"Monsieur Bellew, he grow like the old Monsieur. They read the books together. Monsieur Bellew was not like it when he come here. And now they do grind Madame between them like the millstones. It is all self, self. And Madame is alone—between them."

Elizabeth was in deep waters; Anne refused to try even to follow her. Besides, the old woman had always been prejudiced against Archer. Even now she was trying to express her dislike of him.

"His eyes," grumbled she, "were always as hard as the little stones in the brook."

"Oh, hang," said Anne, "why can't people live without tying themselves into knots?"

Elizabeth raised her hand and pointed off the ill-omened words with the sign against the evil eye. It was her one religious dogma, a belief in the evil eye. She lay awake that night fulminating curses on Anne's chestnuts that lay in hard lumps in her interior.

It was a strange chance, nay, two strange chances that had brought Elizabeth to share the fortunes of the Hereford family. The connection had begun twenty-three years ago by the smashing of the glass door at the top of the stone staircase leading into the concierge's courtyard in the pension of the Rue de Milan in Paris, whither Mr. Hereford had brought his wife and children to live. In the tinkling fall of the shining discs brought about by her broom handle Elizabeth heard the crash of a universe, for after thirty years of incessant service in the Pension she knew naught of all the wonders beneath the stars save the steam-heated rooms, the faded bravery of the lofty, gilded walls, the shifts and tempers of the poverty-stricken place. A railway time-table was a mystery to her and she had never seen the Opera House.

"Never have I seen such doings," shouted Madame of the Pension to Elizabeth, "never. Last night you told a pensionnaire who wanted hot water that here one washes only at night. And to-day this——"

The fracas brought Mrs. Hereford into the hall. She stood watching Madame, the powdered surface of whose puffy face was heaving like the sea in a ground-swell. "You shall go," shrieked she, "and out of your wages you shall pay for the pane. Insolent, ungrateful beast, you who make ten centimes on every candle, besides the profits on matches."

Elizabeth's head shook as though with palsy. But she understood; it was difficult to grind enough labour out of creaking bones like hers, especially in a house built centuries ago by a Scottish nobleman when water and gas were nothing accounted of. Besides, Elizabeth snapped sometimes, and wore a wool tippet on a cold morning. The pensionnaires laughed at her.

Once outside the Pension walls, the roar of Paris seemed to Elizabeth like the tide of a human sea. On the table after she had gone Madame found a ten franc piece, saved from vile sulphur matches and swift burning candles. No one but Anna, the concierge, saw her go, as she scuttled into the open like a mouse from the wainscot.

At last when she came to the sullen flow of the Seine, something caught at her throat. Yet she bought hot chestnuts and warmed her hands with them gallantly enough. The boulevards were wind-swept, but the gendarmes were kindly directing posts—when she had got used to their sex, for the Pension was chiefly inhabited by women. At last she found in the Boulevard Montparnasse the cheap warren that an art student had once mentioned and, for one franc fifty centimes, a bedroom. Never in her life had Elizabeth encountered so many men, and when the valet de chambre next morning stood outside her door as he polished the boots she gave up the struggle and resigned herself to the world of males that surged outside the Rue de Milan.

Later the grey north light shone full on the row of models, drawn up on the platform of the Académie Délécluse. Elizabeth had not lived for nothing in the air of Paris, where every work-girl knows that art is a métier and quite distinct from sign-painting.

At the quilled cap above the fierce old face, storm-stressed, the master paused a moment. For a quick sketch of a costume model, admirable. He whistled through his teeth as he rattled a pencil against them, little knowing that the force and fire in the face before him sprang from horror at his own innocent scrutiny on the one side and the flash of the Seine on the other. On the knife-edge between—Elizabeth.

Then she drew in her breath sharply. "Let me see the neck and head bare," said he blandly. Praying pitifully within, Elizabeth lifted her hands to the cap that covered the wisps of hair on her shrunken scalp. No, she could not do it. It was ugly. And the fibrous neck, that was ugly, too.

In that moment the Seine flashed, and the candle-lighted Rue de Milan faded, for its doors were closed. The bare, aged head next moment bowed humbly before the eyes of Monsieur, who had not the faintest idea that he was slaughtering an innocent.

"A fine head," said he, "chiselled, chiselled. The lines leap to the eyes. I have it—a good idea."

Then he turned to Vin Hereford, who had been watching the scene with a smile on his lips. He recognized the *bonne à tout faire* of the Pension and was storing up the tale as a good one to tell his wife.

"But," said the master to him, "can you lend me the daughter, the little Anne, to-day, Monsieur Hereford, and then you will see? It will be a good study of old age and childhood."

Then they had lifted into Elizabeth's arms the fair-haired child and made her stoop above it, touching with her lips the rosy softness of its face. The two hailed each other as old friends, for it was not by any means the first time that Elizabeth had held the small Anne Hereford.

Sitting so, while the babe fell asleep, Elizabeth forgot her horror, forgot her loneliness. Queer thoughts came instead; thoughts of the life she had missed in the Rue de Milan in her thirty years of chamber serving. Then the child stirred and they let her get down from the estrade.

Somehow Vin Hereford did a kind thing, by one of those quick, impulsive instincts that every now and then sent his wife into the truly conjugal heaven of the affectionate spouse. He walked out of the studio by the side of Elizabeth, the child holding hands between them. It was noon, and as they passed a restaurant, "Come in here and let us eat together," said he. "It shall be a feast, for Anne hath earned her first silver-piece as model."

That night the child fell asleep in Elizabeth's arms, tightly clasping René, the bear. For Elizabeth had been taken home by Mr. Hereford and once there, his wife insisted on taking pity on the piece of human flotsam, on leaving the Pension and taking her with them.

They found refuge, the five of them, in the cheap hotel that Elizabeth had discovered. The air from the half-open window at the head of her bed brought rheumatism to her shoulders, and Elizabeth had all a Frenchwoman's hatred of that *courant d'air*, but without the open window the bambino would have stifled in the rank smoke from next door, the smoke from the cigar of the Monsieur who apparently never slept. Between cigar-smoke and open window, Elizabeth was happy—as she had never been in the Rue de Milan. In the blue ichor of her sunken veins the red blood tingled with life as the smooth baby limbs stretched against hers.

That was twenty-three years ago. There was no horror anywhere, neither in the cruel north light of the studio, nor in the Seine gleam, for Elizabeth had entered into a rich human heritage. There was Madame, the kindly, to be loved; there was Mademoiselle Sara to be revered for possessing youth, beauty, grace; there was, above all, *la petite* Anne, aged four, to be slapped, washed, fed and idolised. Monsieur was a cross, but the cross, too, is human.

Such was the resurrection of Elizabeth from the tomb of servitude in the Rue de Milan.

CHAPTER IV

AN ESSAY IN HEROICS: IN THIS BILLY KNYVETT PUTS ON WINGS AND SEVERAL PEOPLE EAT DUCK

DAWN on the river and a tenor voice singing Fielding's catch:—

> "The dusky Night rides down the Sky,
> And ushers in the Morn;
> The Hounds all join in glorious Cry,
> The Huntsman winds his Horn."

So sang Philip Hawkins, uncle on the mother's side to the Hereford sisters. And if it was the hairy seaman who laid the match to Mr. Knyvett's resolve to go a-gold-hunting, it was Uncle Pip who stoked up the fire thereof.

Just now he was leaning back with a magnificent air in the stern sheets of a waterman's boat as it shot out from the quay. Tucking his short legs away beneath his magnificent paunch, he snuffed the morning freshness with wide nostrils, the while his merry green eyes watched the bustle of the opening day.

Behind the hills stretched a slowly widening belt of light. Smoke wreaths left behind by a train in the still air of the valley were tinged a faint rose-pink, but rising into higher levels, shone in golden splendour. On the hills the light broadened till it moved, a luminous presence, above the smoke-fog of the low lands. Engines clanged to and fro in the station; bells jangled from the anchored vessels; the clanging arms of a derrick waved above the coaler *Obsidian*. Then began the assault of the shipwright's hammers on a bare-ribbed vessel. From inland came the lowing of cows, the clattering of milk-pails, from the river mouth the rattle of gear aboard a trawler that was making the Narrows.

"For all the blessings of this life, good Lord, we thank Thee," said Uncle Pip, as he snuffed vigorously of the sea wind and smacked his chest to get rid of the smell of the feather-beds. Never was there a truer thanksgiving than his, for pleasure was the breath of Uncle Pip's nostrils and the only thing to which he objected was the present age of "tea-twaddle." A vast Falstaffian man, he had been born to put his teeth in a venison pasty, to bury his nose in a black-jack. He delighted in the sea noises, in the sunshine on the roses or the cawing of the rooks in the home fields, in the yeo-heave-ho of a chanty or the smell of the earth after rain. And as for meat and drink! his portentous belly and wide mouth were made for the savouring of both.

A delicate fancy had he, too, which he carefully cherished for the joy it gave him. His "When I went a-pirating long, long ago," had the haunting beauty of the blue distance about it. For nothing gave him greater pleasure than to trace along the cliffs some smugglers' route where old lace and French brandy had passed. Tender, too, was he and would stand outside the houses at Christmas time, listening to the braying of tin trumpets and the shouts of the children behind the curtained windows. The zest of things burnt in his heart like a sea-coal fire in some tale of a wind-swept inn.

So he approached the *Pendragon* with the bait of romance bobbing in front of his nose and for sole regret in his heart a sorrow that the yacht was not called *Espiritu Santu* and fitted with a figurehead painted in blue and gold. For consolation, in fancy, he covered her with gold-dust.

In the suck of the ebb she was swaying slightly, her hull inky black in the shadows, her masts and varnished yards glittering in the sun. Sharp in the bow like a perfect wedge, bulky aft like a timber vessel, with two whale boats amidships, she was more a sealer than a yacht. In the past she had been, in fact, a "Holy Joe," or mission boat, constructed for rough use. No stranger to the green shimmer of breaking seas, she had known the steep slopes of a Cape Horn swell. In spite of paint and brass-rubbing, the battering of waves and winds was eloquent on timbers, spars and running tackle. For she had attained that point in the career of a ship when she is no longer the mere offspring of a man's brain, writ over with his strength and weakness, but is instead a personality on which the days and nights have left their impress, the combers of the Pacific, the greybeards of the Atlantic, the glassy stare of the doldrums, no less than the swift hurtling of the terrible pampero. She was a curious mixture of old and new, a thirty-ton yacht that had once been fitted with a windlass. Even now the old cooks' galley remained, a boxlike erection to larboard of the fo'c'sle hatch. Gemmed with the night dew, her yard-arms glittered like steel for a while.

"Clack-clacka, clack-clacka," came fainter and more faint the creak of a pair of oars in the rowlocks downstream. On the gunwale of the boat sat a man, mother-naked, with the sun gleaming on the bare limbs, on the broad arms folded across the hairy chest. At one moment bathed in sunlight, the next in shadow, in the dazzle of light and darkness, he might have been carved in bronze, were it not for the ripple of muscle under the skin.

"That'll do," said he. The next moment there was the creaming foam of cleft water, the gurgling up-rush of waves against the lightened boat. In its wake rippled a line of white. Now with breast-stroke, now side-stroke, the swimmer made for the sea, his head shining in the water like a seal's. Then he turned and the boat followed, the man standing up to paddle with one oar, till he was obliged to scull against the ebb.

Nearing the yacht, Uncle Pip put hand to lips and shouted :

"*Pendragon!* Ahoy! ahoy! ahoy!"

The echo laughed among the hills, and the mate leant over the bulwarks, his Newgate fringe shining like a nimbus.

"The skipper a-board, Mr. Cole?" shouted Mr. Hawkins.

"There's the skipper," grinned Cole, pointing to the swimmer, while a blue-behinded ape chattered in the scuppers and then clawed its way up the mainmast, its tail lashing behind it.

"Good morning, Mr. Hawkins," shouted Knyvett, approaching the companion-ladder with a rapid side-stroke. Then, with much heaving, Uncle Pip got himself aboard, accompanied by the padding of bare feet and the surge of water as the swimmer followed.

A nautical bustle like this had a classic flavour about it to Uncle Pip, for had not his idol, Henry Fielding, gone on a voyage to Lisbon and painted the rough and tumble of sea-faring days? On Fielding Mr. Hawkins had pastured all his life, so that from him he could quote long passages full of the Virtues in big letters and the masculine frailties in small ones. It was even now to Uncle Pip a point of some literary importance to belittle the achievements of the amorous bookseller as compared with the blusterous, derring-do of that queer epitome of man's lowest weakness and most divine strength, Henry Fielding.

"I want you," said he, "to come over to Foxholt for dinner. We've got two pair of ducks killed and the girls coming."

"Chick, chick, chick," hissed the ape, making for his bow-legs as he waddled across the deck, swaying like a goose.

"A rare lot of live stock you've got here," said Mr. Hawkins.

Two huge Angora cats sunned themselves on the fore hatch and a marmoset fraternised with a goat.

"This here vessel," said the mate, "is a menagerie of all the things that crawl the earth and swim upon the sea. Here we be a-rehearsing for the garden of Eden. The last we had was a pair of land-crabs till, they squatting upon a board, the cats give it a tilt and over they went. Neatest thing as ever I see."

The great panther-like creatures filled the air with a mighty purring as they leapt upon the mate's shoulder and crawled along his outstretched arm.

Below a mighty bustle was toward as the black steward cast about him to find provender for the vast appetite at that moment descending the companion stairs.

"Ah, Mistah Hawkins, he come," said he in his soft, mouthy talk, "de York ham, de rasheres, de raised pie, de rolls, de cream, jam, honey . . . lah, lah, lah." In his haste he fairly capered while Mr. Hawkins sinking into a swivel-chair, poised himself above the victuals, taking an inventory.

"Caw-fee," ejaculated the darky, and presently from the caboose came a mighty stoking and then the rumbling of coal followed by the sputtering of water on burning metal. Cornelius was one of the order of cooks who burn down a house to fricassee a fowl leg.

Meanwhile, napkin under chin, Mr. Hawkins, not waiting for his host, laid about him lustily.

"I say," shouted he, "look alive, Knyvett. I've got scores of things I want to talk to you about."

He rapped with the handle of his knife to attract attention. Overhead the wind was beginning to hum through the spars.

"Good," grunted he, swishing down a pint or so of hot coffee, the darky watching benevolently. "Never go about to borrow trouble, my son," said Mr. Hawkins to him. "Trouble's the one thing you can't prepare for, for ten to one it never comes, and if it does, it's sure to be quite different from what you expected it would be."

"And what called forth that remark," asked Mr. Knyvett, entering the saloon, his hands full of letters.

"Something my wife said to me this morning. But that's the way with women, always worrying. Too many women by half over there," said he, jerking his thumb shorewards. "Place swarms with the nervous little cusses. Can't put your foot down for 'em anywhere."

Mr. Knyvett being engaged for the moment in turning over the mail, the mate chipped in with the air of an expert on the subject.

"With women," said he, "you must take 'em as you find 'em, same as with wind and tide—clap on all sail when they'm fair and slip along, close-reefed, when they'm foul."

"A word above rubies, Mr. Cole," said Uncle Pip, reaching for the butter. "After thirty years of experience with my first, which was also my last, I've learnt no more than that."

"Sounds like a public, the First and the Last," said the mate, finding himself unexpectedly brilliant.

"Well," said Mr. Hawkins, "what I want to know is about this gold-hunting business of yours. Gold by the ton, my nieces tell me. Never heard of such a thing in my life. What wouldn't I give to be going with you."

"Huh!" said the mate from the depths of his stomach.

"Mr. Cole hasn't that faith in Bodinar that could be wished," smiled Knyvett.

"Shifty-eyed, ferrety-faced," agreed the mate. "But that's no business of mine. Say you: 'Sail the *Pendragon* to hell,' I'd sail it. That's the way I am."

"A buccaneer. No less," quoth Mr. Hawkins, rejoicing. "But this Bodinar—now?"

"I've been to see his former employers. They substantiate his story. It made, I find, something of a sensation, that voyage. There was a kind of broadsheet circulated hereabouts of the cruise."

Knyvett tossed across the table a sheet of print, which Mr. Hawkins read, holding the page close to his eyes with his glasses pushed up over his forehead.

"Hah!" he said. "Good. 'On one occasion some Patagonians approached them in a fierce, threatening attitude, clothed with skins and armed with bows and arrows!' Fine! Fine!"

"That," laughed Knyvett, "was, I think, one of those fancy touches that are characteristic of the man."

"But the treasure?"

"Somewhere in the neighbourhood of latitude 51° 43′ south and longitude 73° 59′ west—in a land-locked cove. Alluvial sand, probably. My plan is to take the *Pendragon* out to Punta Arenas. To send by sailing vessel from Glasgow camping stores, tents, gold-washing apparatus and a steam-tug slung on deck. To pick up the tug at Sandy Point from the *Pendragon* and steam up Smyth's Channel."

"That'll mean a good 'thou.' You'll let me have a share in the venture, Knyvett. Stand me in for half of the costs and a third of the profits that go to the adventurers."

"The adventurers are, so far, Peter Westlake and myself."

"And Mr. Cole?"

"Mr. Cole will have nothing to do with it, but wages for his part of the work."

"Hasn't got the guts for it, you may say," interposed the gentleman in question.

"Bodinar gets a third of the net profits and what's left after prize money has been paid to Mr. Cole and the crew is to be shared between the prospectors."

"Let's see, let's see," exclaimed Uncle Pip, spreading himself over the table, as Knyvett began to clear a space for a chart. A slight refreshing dew burst out on Mr. Hawkins' temples, for the blood of his ancestors ramped in his veins.

"Hist!" said the mate, suddenly laying a hand on Mr. Hawkins' arm. "There's Bodinar. And what the devil's the matter with him?"

The three bent down over the table, staring through the left port-hole across the river, swelling now in long, glassy rolls.

Bodinar's movements were certainly peculiar. He was crouching, huddled-up, in the stern of a rowboat, wrapped in a heavy cloak, with head turning constantly over his shoulder as though pursued. The boat seemed seaward bound till he leant forward and said something to the rower, who with a heavy rush of surging water brought the boat round to the stern of the *Pendragon* and so into the shadow where the saloon watchers could not follow him. But the mate was at the right port-hole in a second. And when the curtain came sagging against the closed glass from the open port-hole on the other side, with one hand he held it quiet, while he listened to the sound of a boat grazing against the yacht side and to the quick licking of a rope against the bulwarks. Mr. Bodinar was coming aboard in a hurry.

"Look out, sir," said the mate, "t'other side. Is he followed ?"

But there was nothing to be seen except a steamer being towed from its moorings by a tug.

"Queer go," said the mate.

The trampling overhead was followed by the dragging of a sack.

"Mr. Bodinar's brought his furniture," said Mr. Cole. "That was a badly frightened man, sir ?"

At the top of the companion, when Knyvett reached it with his mate, stood Bodinar. In the daylight the sweat-drops gleamed on his face. Getting him down to the saloon they left him there with Mr. Hawkins.

"What d'you make of it ?" asked Knyvett of his mate, as they watched the boat that had brought Bodinar zigzagging among the vessels.

"Cutting off his tracks, so that whatever's behind shan't know which boat he's on," said Mr. Cole. "Somebody wants Mr. B. rather pressing, I should say."

"So should I," answered Knyvett. "Who is it, d'you think ?"

"Might be a ghost, might be a 'tec and might be just a bad conscience. But it looks like a pier-head jump with the police behind."

Not a sail, not an oar nor the shadow of one was to be seen on the river.

"To-morrow I'll take him through the town. And do you keep a sharp eye on him to-day," said Captain Knyvett.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the mate, all agog for a bit of detective work.

It was rather a surprise to Knyvett to find how thoroughly he was being committed by other people's zeal to a wild-goose chase after these sands of gold. Yet in it he acquiesced, recognising clearly that it would provide a healthy bit of rough experience for Peter Westlake, as well as a means of escape for himself from the cloud of worry that hung over Craneham. For one thing only had terrors for Knyvett—a fear of being engulfed by the octopus of human complication. The mere thought of it would often set him knocking head against the wall of circumstance. With Sara in the clutches of the serpents, he would venture a dashing cut at the clasping coils, but would never risk the hungry grip of them for himself. Hence he seldom stayed long in the vicinity of the Herefords, but would appear, stay for a few weeks, and then vanish with the same flip of decision with which he turned on his heel up a new road. For Knyvett always left a railway station without a parting glance at a friend.

Once at Foxholt with Uncle Pip he plunged into a past age. There, noon was the dining-hour and, the board cleared, one paced the terrace in spacious leisure, with the river winding through the champaign below like a streak of pewter. Beyond the serenity of wide distances lay the streak of the channel, a bar of shifting opal.

It was a clear day of early spring when the hills on the horizon are almost as blue as the edges of the cloud sweeps that merge in unveiled azure. The tiny valleys were filled with leafless trees or patched with the purple of plough-land and the grey-green of grass. Over all poured the clear light, making the hedges almost indigo and the woodlands of a clouded, satiny sheen that billowed round the black tracery of straggling pines and cedars. A Japanese painter would have found himself at home with the clear light, the black shadows, the formal contours of trees and breast-like hills patched to the semblance of a cottage counterpane.

The house was a lofty grey building with lattice-paned Elizabethan windows and wide gables where the yellow stonecrop grew. In the bow of the great mullioned window they sat at table, with the sunshine playing hide and seek on water bottles and wine jugs, while Mrs. Hawkins prattled to the tune of veni, vidi, vici, as she carved the ducks, tenderly laying portions of them on each plate in embalmment of sage and onions.

Mellow was she as October sunlight, sweet-fleshed as quarrender or pippin, and her delight in the fact that they could produce peas in winter was an intellectual triumph, for the bottling of them had been attended with so many fears.

She was an ample woman, bulging out in unexpected directions, like a swelling Spanish galleon, marvellous beamy in the build, with bright brown eyes, a yellowish skin, a hairy mole on her left cheek, and a dimple, as fascinating as that of a four-year-old, on her right. She had but one trouble in the world, now that Pip had got over his "flightiness," and' that was the inability of her stomach to keep pace with her palate.

The talk turning on Bodinar, she kept an inscrutable smile while the story of the morning was told.

"There's one thing none of you ever thought of," said she at last.

Sara leant forward, one arm on the polished mahogany, for they were come to the dessert stage by now.

"I know," she said, her lips pouting delicately towards the grape she held up to them. Quite regal she looked in the Charles II. chair with a carved back and arms that held her. "I know what Aunt Hatty means. It might be——"

She laughed, holding out her hands like a sibyl as they bent towards her—Billy, Uncle Pip and Anne.

"It wasn't a ghost, nor a man in blue that was after him, I believe. But it might have been—a woman."

"That's so," nodded Mrs. Hawkins. "And when you've got out of his wife all *she* knows, then perhaps you'll be a bit wiser than you are now."

"His wife!" exclaimed Knyvett. "Why I forgot to find out about that. And after all, he may not have one."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Mrs. Hawkins, "a sailorman of fifty and no wife! Don't tell me."

"More likely fifty of 'em," shouted Uncle Pip. "Nay, nay," continued he to Sara, "don't shake your dear little hands at me."

"Have I dear little hands—Billy?" asked Sara, turning from Uncle Pip's amorousness to Billy's solemn face. He was indeed *un homme sérieux*, as Elizabeth would have said. And watching Sara's coquetry, the pretty airs that a woman only shows when she is happy and well-liked, Captain Knyvett wondered at the sad-faced constraint of her demeanour in the stagnant air of her own home. This bright-eyed, laughing woman scarcely seemed the same creature as the mistress of Craneham.

After dinner they gathered round the log fire, Billy and Sara settling to chess in the corner with beside them the blue Devon sheep-dog sighing blissfully in the heat. Anne followed Mrs. Hawkins to the window-seat, out of ear-shot of the players.

"Sara's happy to-day," said Mrs. Hawkins.

"As she would be if——" answered Anne.

"Don't say it, my dear," protested Mrs. Hawkins, "I've a superstition about saying things. To think a thing is bad enough, but you bring it much nearer if you say it. You're all very silly about Sara. Everybody sits glumping and glooming about that marriage and then you're all surprised that Sara isn't happy! Fool talk, I call it."

"I've been staying with his mother on my way down," said Anne, nodding at Mr. Knyvett's back.

"Ah, and what's she like?"

"Everything in turn. A fine lady with a heart as simple as a tramp woman's. She told me how it was that he lost Sara. You remember? When everyone thought it was going to happen. He was the active partner in an engineering business and had work all over the world then from silver mines in Peru to main drains in Kimberley. Pulling strings everywhere, he was. To use her words: the world was his back garden. In one hand he held—Power. He used to talk to her sometimes how he could make and mar men. He was lost in it. He loved it."

Mrs. Hawkins dropped her wool work—Berlin wool slippers in a design of roses for Uncle Pip. In her well-padded life she was not used to looking into burning cauldrons and Anne's manner was scorching.

"He used to talk," she continued, "like the man in 'John Gabriel Borkman' of the spirits of the mine and of the earth that he let out."

"Don't," said Mrs. Hawkins, kicking her in the way in which she roused the dog when he snored in his sleep.

"That was in one hand—Power," said Anne. "In the other was Sara. He didn't know then which he valued most. And anyway, Sara could wait, for she was always there, you see."

Knyvett laughed at the moment, holding up a pawn between finger and thumb. It sounded grisly to Aunt Hatty, as she drew her shawl nearer to her ears.

"Then father married Sara to Archer. And Billy found, when he'd lost her, that after all the thing he could never have now was the thing he really wanted."

"That's a man all over," said Mrs. Hawkins.

"And that taught him another thing; that Sara had never been his the least little bit in the world. Not a bit of her mind, of her soul, of what to Billy is really Sara, had ever been his. He had never even understood her, for if he had, he would have known she was going to marry Archer. It came as a thunderbolt because she had always been a stranger to him."

"Glad am I," said Mrs. Hawkins, "that I hadn't got to marry my Pip when all this stuff about 'understanding' and 'being strangers' was about. The constitution won't stand it. That's why Sara and Billy both look so thin."

"It broke him anyway," said Anne. "He kicked over everything. Gave up his work and went to live on his yacht."

"Sulks!" commented Mrs. Hawkins. She was a woman whose simple philosophy was—to keep smiling.

Of Sara and of Billy she was much in awe, for Sara was a little *de haut en bas*, and Mr. Knyvett had a certain afflatus of wealth and position. Of Anne and Peter Westlake, being humble folk in stature and in manner, she felt no awe.

" Don't you make a mess of things, either, with Peter."

" Oh ! Flibbertigibbet ! " said Anne. " Billy tells me he's giving up his missioning here, to escape my charms. Fun, isn't it ? "

" Anne Hereford, you're turning out a heartless girl. I shall wash my hands of you."

" No, you won't, because if you're good, I'll tell you a secret. And you know that an éclair and a secret are two things you can never resist."

" Well ? " asked Mrs. Hawkins, smiling till she flushed in expectation.

" I like Peter—in a way, now that he isn't so ' pi.' But he's stupid, of the last century, because he's going off to try and sweep up gold-dust to keep *ME*—ME—ME ; as if I was going to be a kept woman. I'm going to pay my own way, ring or no ring. Am I, Mistress Hawkins, born to be a toy to any man ? And just fancy Peter, dear old pious Peter, with a woman toy ! "

" How dare you use such language ? And as for stupid, well, men *are* that. I've never had but one child and that's my old man, Pip, and many's the time he's put his head on my shoulder and told me how wicked he's been. For women can find the way in the dark, by the feel of the road in front of them, when they love. But a man always wants a lanthorn in front of *him*."

" When they love, yes. But Sara's never known what that is," said Anne sadly.

" How can you talk so wicked, with those two sitting right in front of your very eyes, Anne Hereford ? "

She nodded towards the chess players, who were pursuing a curious game in which Billy read Sara's thoughts, nimbly running just ahead of her every time.

These two always talked better when there was a third person present. For then the unspoken things got more chance of being said. At other times their pedestrian chatter would stump prosaically along the highway of common talk the while their real thoughts hovered overhead, butterflies whose white wings flashed but seldom. Then every sentence spoken had its shadow unexpressed. They would spar, and sight an idyll; jibe, and look down a glade of the *pays du tendre*.

"Yes," said Anne slowly, "but—Sara doesn't know. She never will know, I think, till she misses it, what Billy feels for her. She has a deal of the old man in her, after all. She'll take and never return; be waited on and never give it a thought. That's Sara—a Basil plant, like dad, for all her sweetness. And Billy is the man she feeds on. But she doesn't know it, nor does he."

"You're as cheerful as a churchyard," grumbled Mrs. Hawkins, secretly nodding agreement. Of her two nieces, Sara was not the one she loved.

The matter was not so simple as Anne supposed, for, apart from Sara altogether, it was characteristic of Billy to start off on new tacks at a moment's notice. Unbound by any fetters, human or otherwise, he refused to travel in a straight line for long. In this he was by no means unique for, granted a sufficiency of means, few versatile persons would consent to remain in one profession. It is poverty of brains, no less than poverty of purse, that keeps a man in a rut. Scientific in habit of thought, Knyvett was bound for a time to apply himself to earth-tunnelling or water-conducting, and to work with fiery zeal. But one morning he awoke to find virtue gone out of him; then for an interval there was nothing for it but the toil of some primitive life, preferably the perpetually changing horizons of the sea. After that might come, perhaps, another dive into civilised pursuits, with the balance oscillating to politics.

First and last this was no man to be bound by chains. Tie him down to restrictions, domestic or otherwise, and he would make the welkin echo with shouts of revolt, for here we have a pig that could never be ringed. Never, in fact, had he wanted Sara so much as now—when she was out of reach, for it was the absence of all claim that kept him bound to her. And scientific in his love-making, her case had a fascination for him apart from romance; it might become an interesting experiment in sociology, now that the very elements of social life are being flung into the crucible of change. Through Sara he saw a chance of giving one feature of the bad old days a shove into the limbo kept for historic customs.

But all this was beyond the simple thought of Anne, who was neither psychologist nor cynic.

"Is it going to be all right for Peter?" asked Mr. Knyvett suddenly over the chess play.

"I think so," answered Sara; "I hope so. He's just the sort for her. She wouldn't appreciate a beauty or a sage, but she'll just love furbishing up a lame dog all her days. For Anne is an unselfish egoist. She knows herself to be a charming person who always carries her own sunshine with her. And through that veil she feels that nothing can get at her to hurt."

Knyvett thought it none too kindly an analysis of a sister, but Sara loved her friends wisely, so that no disillusion ever awaited her.

"Anne is the daintiest creature imaginable," continued she, "but all the same she really enjoyed the fleas that the Irish servant used to catch in her bed when she was working in the Liverpool slums. For they gave her such a priceless opportunity of rising above untoward circumstances."

"So poor old Peter is to go down in the same list with the fleas!"

"He's just the man for her, for she could never stand having to crick her neck with looking up to her mate. Do you remember how in the old days when dad's flat was a centre for artists and men——"

He smiled at her classification.

"How she never could abide a bashaw? Only you must take him away while I coach her up in the idea that it's her bounden duty to prove to the world that the married woman doctor is a success. Then it'll be all right."

Finally came Uncle Pip and stirred them up from their drowsy talk, for there was one memory, the glory of

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Foxholt, which he never spared anybody, a memory connected with the barn where a strolling player had once performed, with another Philip Hawkins, a blind organist and the great uncle of the present bearer of that name, playing Beethoven between the acts—to gain a paying audience for the starving troupe.

And not long afterwards, going down to play Shylock at Drury Lane the limping fiddler whom old Hawkins had befriended remarked to his wife: "It's success—or death for me to-night." And it was success, since the strolling player had been Edmund Kean. No wonder that the barn which had been so honoured was to Uncle Hawkins a shrine to which he led all pilgrims who would be likely to appreciate the honour.

They all stood in the doorway gazing into the mellow darkness where the farm carts stood in rows on the floor of trodden earth in which the hens had made rough circles in the dust. The air was full of a smell of hay and roots and high up in the walls two deep square window slits let in clear glimpses of the sky. At the far end of the yard the setting sun shone behind a clump of trees, outlining the wintry nakedness of their delicate arms against the glow. It was very still; not a twig moved, not a feathery head of dried stonecrop shivered on any roof.

Then from the darkened end of the barn Anne sang:

"Love in my bosom like a bee,
Doth suck his sweet;
Now with his wings he plays with me,
Now with his feet.
Within mine eyes he makes his nest,
His bed amidst my tender breast,
My kisses are his daily feast;
And yet he robs me of my rest,
Ah, wanton, will ye?"

The motes in the candle rays danced; slowly the red of the sky faded; the green grew colder till it was steel-blue. Sara's face was but a white shadow and every moment to Knyvett she seemed to be growing further away from him. For he was trying to follow her thoughts, to leap across the barrier that separates man from woman. Her face was unutterably sad. Was it from regret? What was it like, to live in that mind of hers? He willed her to look at him, for he wanted to tear down the bar between them, the gossamer web of iron that two temperaments build.

Then as her eyes met his in a long gaze, he swore that never should there fall over her, through him, the faintest shadow of any baseness. He would not even suffer the smallness of covetous pain to invade his lightest thought of her. She seemed to be asking, not what he longed to give, the hourly care that should read the flicker of an eyelid and leap to her thought like the shadow that follows substance, but that courage, that high contempt of circumstance that only those can give who wear the wings of great desire.

Spoilt was she by another man's owning?

At the very word he jibbed, for it was not "owning" that he craved. Had he not, even now, the better thing? For he could follow her, it seemed, into the spiritual world that music opens; he could speak with her, bodiless, in a voice that needed no sound.

Then she looked away and sighed, while Knyvett smiled, almost pitying the pair that would never know that other desire which beats against the walls of sense, that from the pain of a wound learns the ecstasy of deathlessness.

But he was alone all the time, since Sara had merely been considering her own fingers, wondering, in fact, why they were so powerless to grasp what she wanted. It was the strolling player who had suggested the thought, for he had known how to grip success, to lay hands on power, to escape from poverty and squalor. Every fibre of his nature had struggled for it.

As hers did *not*, for deep below all desire of escape, she knew that her self-pride kept her in her place. She could not bear to think that she had ever failed in any demand made on her; her querulous father, her neglectful husband, were powerless to alter her own determined uprightness.

But Captain Billy? For after all his eyes had drawn hers. Only, compelled by his gaze, she saw how he could be made to serve her. Since his money, his influence, his obedience, were hers for the asking; she had only to lift a finger.

That was how it looked to Sara. For Billy Knyvett had only been smoking an enchanted cigarette.

CHAPTER V

A SIBYL OF THE SLUMS: CONTAINING THE LEGEND OF A TOBY JAR AND A DIVINING CRYSTAL

AT Dartmouth quay that night Mr. Knyvett found the yacht's dinghy moored at the landing-slip, the ship's boy in attendance. From within the bar of the "Valiant Sailor" came the hum of voices.

"What's the meaning of this, Bennett?" asked Billy.

"Mr. Cole's in there with Mr. Bodinar; meller he is, too, and talking fine," answered the boy.

"Go in and say quietly, without attracting attention, that Mr. Cole is wanted outside."

In went the boy and presently out came Cole, "up the pole," but not excessively so.

"We've got Bodinar in there," remarked he triumphantly, "and we'd the devil's own time to do it, I can tell you."

"Why?" demanded Knyvett curtly. "I never heard there was usually much difficulty in getting a sailor into a public house."

"There was with him, sir. I'll tell 'ee how 'twas. First, this morning I talked over the ship a bit with 'en. Told 'en 'twas a place where the steward aired your nightshirt and that. Then, when he'd liquored up, said I: 'There's a pretty brew at the "Valiant Sailor." Let's ashore and try it. It's my leave.'

"'No,' says he, 'not me. I don't go ashore till 'tis dark and the last train's left for Brixham.'

"'Got a friend on her then?' asked I.

"'Hope so,' says he. And that's all he would say. But I got 'en here at last. And that Hicks he wanted to go is no cop. A drunken, lazy good-for-nort. That's what they all say. Ain't no class at all. But Bodinar swears he won't go without 'en. His right hand man he is, says B. It's my opinion he and Hicks have put their heads together to get us out there and then do for us, bringing the gold home for theirselves."

"Cole," said Mr. Knyvett, "you've been going in for reading that's far too lurid. Lead the way in and let's have a look at Bodinar."

The air of the sanded bar parlour was clammy and wondrous beery, but in the neighbourhood of the great tree-root burning in the grate, quite bearable. The tables and chairs showed the woody fibres of the grain of their wood as a post-impressionist study shows the lines of a face. Mr. Bodinar was shouting to the landlord who, in shirt-sleeves and broadcloth trousers, exuded sleek moisture from every pore, and creaks from every inch of his brightly polished shoes. His hair was plastered with grease and the waistcoat button in the small of his back had a rakish air.

"Women!" cried Bodinar. "I've knowed women for forty year and more. But never did I see such women as we've got now. Why, here's women tackling burglars single-handed and standing 'pon deck with the ship going down under 'em, and never so much as a scritch. It's against all nature, for 'tis the make of the women to fear and the make of the men to comfort 'em. But, when a woman don't *want* comforting, what's a man to do?"

His voice rose to a bellow, but he was too overcome by his grievances to stop for any newcomers. His nose was the colour of copper and the firelight turned his matted hair to the hue of lichen as he leant over the table.

"You'll get the ins and outs of it to-night, sir," said Cole in a low voice.

"By Jove, he's a tarry breeks," exclaimed Mr. Knyvett.

Bodinar was by this time in that state when a man pays no heed to anything said below a certain level of voice.

"I didn't know you were so well up in the subject," said Knyvett, nodding to the landlord to bring spirits and glasses.

"Women! I know 'em better'n I know my own face. I like 'em clinging and tender myself," said he, giving a hitch to his garments, "always did. And I suppose that's why I got married to a strammocking, upstanding woman that didn't know what fear was. No, nor you couldn't teach it to her, neither, though I tried most ways."

"So," thought Knyvett, "Sara was right. "It's an affair of *cherchez la femme* after all."

"I don't see why you married her then," said he.

"Don't you?" snorted he. "Why, that's the way with the women down here. As maids, they're ripe and melting; tender little doves that'll barely coo when you stroke 'em. That's Devon maids. But Devon wives! Good Lor'! Do 'ee know why two-thirds of the able-seamen in the English navy be Devon men?" he exclaimed, turning fiercely on Knyvett.

"No, but I know it's a point much debated by naval experts."

"Experts here, experts there! 'Tis to get away from the Devon women that so many Devon men take to sea. 'Tis the women that keep up the supply of men for King George's ships. They may tell up old trade about the call of the sea, but 'tis the call of the Devon women as they lads cannot bear morning, noon and night. For proper terrors they be, when you get to know them. The bo'sun's whistle's naught to 'em. And upon a man-o'-war you be as free of 'em as you can be anywhere in this earth."

"But you're not a navy man?"

"Not me! I knowed a trick worth two of that. First 'long I worked on a coaster that got wrecked off Ushant. All hands given out for lost. I wasn't, though, for I come ashore all right. But I didn't tell up any old yarns about sole survivor. I just took my hook and went off and knocked about a bit. Lost, dead, drownded—and Bessie a widow. You twig ? I thought I'd take a holiday for a bit."

He winked portentously.

"But," he resumed, "I didn't go off like that till I'd tried to break Bessie's spirit every way I could think of. And, my word, what a spirit there was to her, too."

He spat, joyously exact.

"I can mind it all, same as if 'twas yesterday. Us hadn't been married a year when there was a crane working just alongside the quay, clearing out a ship's hold. Somehow 'twas out of order, and in another minute would ha' let down a ton of concrete upon the men below. Bessie noted it, and out and thrust in her arm instead of the bar that was missing. Snap went the arm, but it saved the men's lives. And her never said a word when they set it, only went a bit white-like about the gills, and called me a fule for looking at her so sheep-like.

"And that was the same woman that used to give a bit of a shy laugh to show where her was, when her waited for me down street-end back along in the courting days.

"For you can tell what the cider'll be from the apples you use, and what the beer'll be from the hops, but you can't tell the woman by the maid."

"Did her ever knuckle under ?" enquired the mate.

"Not her. Being short-handed one day, I took her out to help with the boat. I did it purposely, for I saw with the tail of my eye, 'twas blowing up for a thunderstorm. Ever seen a thunderstorm at sea from an open boat ?" he enquired, turning towards the innkeeper, instinctively knowing him to be no seaman.

"Never," said he.

"Then you don't know what 'tis to look in the face of Fear," said he, his voice changing to the long cadence with which sailors speak of the awe of the sea.

"It gathered in round us darker and darker and far off, pretty nigh from t'other side of the world, there come a low roaring. But I wouldn't put back, for I'd sworn I'd see her shiver, make her turn to me for comfort.

"Then a little wind stirred across the sea. I can feel the puff of it now in my face. Her was steering when it come. I seed her head bend down all still and quiet, and then against the black sky in a roar like hell-mouth opening, the jag, jag, jag of the lightning.

" 'Bessie,' said I—'Bessie, are you there?' when the roar drew off for a minute and I could hear the suck of the water against the gunwales, afore the rain come down.

" 'Yes, I be,' says she, 'but no thanks to the fule that brought me out, when a blind puppy could have smelt a storm. But you'm not fit to be in charge of a cat, leave alone a boat.'

"After that I give it up. I'd seen strong men cower in bottom of boat afore a storm of lightning at sea. And not a mite of feeling did her show, but temper. But, all the same, when us moored up safe along quayside at last, I just heard her give a little sigh, sort of half a sob like. I often thought of that bit of a sigh while I stayed away in Ameriky."

"So you did come back to her?" asked Knyvett.

"Well, yes," said he shamefacedly. "You see, her fried tetties capital, and her'd a little bit of money, too. And Ameriky's all very well in its way, but somehow they'm more homely, the old scolds at home.

"But when I come back, I put up at the old 'Ship' a day or two, and didn't say who I was. I thought I'd just see how my lady had been behaving, for there might have been another chap come in and hung up his hat in my house. But I found there hadn't, though several had tried, some of 'em telling up tales about being me, only so changed by beating on the rocks that my own mother wouldn't know me.' But to one and all that made out to be her long-lost husband her said but one thing:

" 'Let 'en come in and fetch a whistle out of the old Toby jar, and I'll believe 'en.'

"They say there was as many of 'em as half a dozen at a time outside, waiting to blow away at that old jar.

"At that, I togs myself up and round to the house. And when I got there, I didn't so much as scrape my boots, for I wanted to show I was master.

"In I walked and says I, 'Bessie, I've come back.'

' " ' Oh,' says she, ' hev'ee ? I've heard something like that before, I fancy.'

" But her knowed me, I could see that. Yet I said not a word. I just picked up a cup from the kitchen dresser and out to the tap and filled it. I poured the water from it into the mouthpiece of the old jar and then I lifted 'en to my mouth. The sound come beautiful, as clear as the bo'sun's whistle when he pipes the watch. For the drop of water in the jug was the secret they other chaps couldn't fathom."

" And did the whistle fetch her ? " asked the landlord, listening open-mouthed.

" It did," he answered grimly, " for her said : ' Simon, go out this minute and scrape your boots.'

" And then I knowed I'd come home. And never did I taste aught to equal the fried tetties and ham of that night's tea. For they've some points, the Devon women, if 'tis only a slick hand with the frying-pan."

" And where's the Toby jar now ? " asked Cole cunningly.

" Why, wherever Bessie is, of course."

" And where's her ? "

" Not forty mile from here, young man. No, nor yet ten. I han't seed her for six months or more, though. But I'll warn if I was to go up not far off the old ' Three Elms ' I'd find Bessie and the Toby."

" That's Higher Brixham, of course," whispered Cole to Mr. Knyvett, who nodded and remarked aloud :

" And to-day 'twas her ghost you saw then ? "

" Ghosts ! ghosts ! don't 'ee talk upon ghosts ! What I have suffered from that old trade, no tongue can tell. But ghosts don't yell, leastwise the ones I know, don't, nor call out : ' Simon, why there's Simon, the gallows-bird ! ' No, nor they don't run round corners, nor dog ye ! "

" So it's all out," said Cole.

" Not all," answered Mr. Knyvett, as he suddenly recalled Peter Westlake's tales of the witch women of Brixham. Leaning forward suddenly he asked in a low voice :

"What trade was it then, Bodinar, that you suffered from? Trade in ghosts?"

Bodinar eyed him curiously for a second.

"Well," said he, love of the lurid overcoming his caution, "how's this, mister? What do you say when a great door-key half turns in the lock with no human hand touching it? That's happened not once nor twice in my house, when Bessie's had a bad case on. I brought her up to look at it once; turned all but round in the lock it was. The leastest little touch and the door would have opened. 'Bessie,' said I, 'how did that come about?' And her laughed and said: 'You girt innocent, I know all about that. That's my business; you leave it to me.' And I did—leave it to her. For 'twasn't human hands as turned that key.'"

Mr. Cole's hair fairly stirred like quills.

"A bad case?" stammered he.

"Ay," said Bodinar, "when there'd been overlooking of man or woman or cheeld—and her was fighting it. But there, 'tis old gab. Her's all right in other ways. Bears chillern, and that, I mean. But still—I quit. No, nor fried tetties wouldn't keep me nuther. Just you go and look at her eyes, mister, and see if you could bide 'em any more'n I can."

"I will," said Mr. Knyvett to himself. "It strikes me there's a good deal to be known about Mr. Bodinar and his household that might come in useful."

Then he threw down the money for the drinks.

"Get him away as quickly as you can," said he to the mate. "He'll probably deny it all to-morrow, but we've got what we wanted anyway. And don't bother him about Hicks. I'll see to that blackguard all right."

"And t'other blackguard," cogitated Cole, eyeing Mr. Bodinar with disgust, "is going to lead us all on a mad cruise round the Horn. Well, well, you never can tell where the maggot'll bite the Old Man next. Come on, you swine;" this to Simon Bodinar. For Mr. Cole, having no taste for psychology, hated a rascal he couldn't see through. And Bodinar was very far from being transparent.

A sudden storm-cloud gathered over the channel and whirling before the northeaster swept up the valley above the houses of Brixham, whitening the grey roof-slates and cutting the faces of those who were abroad with tiny points of steel. The chimney smoke made dirty blurs against the filmy veil that swept across the rows of bare stark houses which fill the rock-hewn place from top to bottom. Then, as the storm rushed inland, a sudden glint of sunlight reddened snowy roofs.

It was the following night when Mr. Knyvett found himself on the winding road of Higher Brixham, passing up and up between houses of every date from the fourteenth century to the twentieth. There were huge white chimneys of mediæval cottages with stone benches built in their walls next to the black and red brick houses of the folk who were making a step in life and had started a piano in the parlour. From the forge came the clanking of welded iron and the smell of singeing hair. Beyond the street, against the masses of cloud, a golden-green light, the essential spirit of the burgeoning time of the year, hovered above meadow and hedgerow. The screaming of the gulls, as they swooped over the purple of newly-ploughed land, shrilled with a note of storm; light and air, earth and sky rioted with life.

Then Knyvett plunged down two steps into a dark stone entrance place below the level of the street. As he knocked he could hear the wind whistle against low, deep, solid walls. From the crannies of the closely shuttered window light poured. At last the door was opened and a girl ushered him in, with a: "Mother, you're wanted." He heard the key turn quickly in the lock of the door at his back. There was a sense as of one being quickly swallowed up in the manner of his reception and in the gust of warm, sickly air that moved towards the draught of the closing door.

The low room where he found himself was divided into two by a partition, the upper half of which was formed by a long pane of glass covered with dingy brown curtains. It was the sort of place where every surface, including that of the skin, seems to gather a scummy deposit of heat and dirt. From the tables slipped greasy table-cloths; from the chairs, patched cushions. In the middle of the room stood a wicker cradle on big rockers. When the girl opened the door in the partition he caught a glimpse of a big fire that roared half up the chimney. From lines close to the ceiling hung garments of flannelette and a chirping of many children made an undertone to the sound of chattering women's voices.

At the noise of the door one of these looked up; a curious head it was to see here, with black bands of hair bound fillet-like, round the fine, haughtily-carried head. Under lip met upper with a square determination that was Cromwellian, but never pinched. The features were chiselled, not moulded, and the chin had a habit of growing portentously huge at a mood. The rounded eyelids like ancient chimney-cowls shrouded the eyes from the merest glimpse of a naughty world.

Billy Knyvett recognised the face in an instant as he pursed his lips for a noiseless whistle. It was the girl called Molly Woodruffe.

"Cut, my dear, and wish," said a hoarse voice, as the partition door banged.

Then followed the slither of pluffy cards and the babble of monotonous patter. One of the panes of the partition was partially opened; it refused to budge under Knyvett's hand and after vainly clattering about to attract attention, he resigned himself to the inevitable.

"You've had a letter lately? And been a bit worried about it? A letter from a foreign port? And you don't know what to do? You've been in two minds about it?"

Walking gingerly, like Agag, the woman went on:

"But he's coming home. So much is plain. Shuffle again, my dear, and cut. And then let's see."

"Silly little fool," ejaculated Knyvett, wondering whether he had better break in on the tête-à-tête and put the girl to mortification or burst open the locked door at the back of him.

"Queer: he's a married man, too. But there's a ring for you; after a time. And as regards your own self, all will be to your satisfaction. It's a good fortune.

It will be decided this year to your satisfaction. If you wish it. Yes, a dark woman and a heart man. And you between."

Then came a skirl of laughter and a sudden screech:

"Maria, come here. Come here when I tell you." Then in a monotone: "You never would believe the trouble I have with that child. I beat her, beat the life nearly out of her. But she's that wilful. Maria, come here and read the crystal for the lady. Yes, my eyes give out. But she's been trained. She'll see what there is to see.

"No, my dear, hold it in the left hand. There's a vein to the left hand straight from the heart, with the glass ball against the velvet. That's it. Now, Maria, speak up plain and tell the lady exactly."

There followed the hiss of an upturned gas jet and then a girl's voice chaunting:

"I see a dark face, a man's face. He stares a great deal. He wears eyeglasses and a fair moustache. He's got funny eyebrows, they run up into points."

"That's right, isn't it?" asked the woman. And from her tone of satisfaction Knyvett knew she was reading the girl's face.

"I can't see any more," said the child's voice. It sounded bored and tired.

Knyvett stood stock still, searching for a clue. The pointed eyebrows were unusual.

"By the Lord!" cried Knyvett at last, for he had got his clue. It was by no means difficult to grasp, for the Woodruffes were well known in the district. So, too, was the man described in the crystal. The only inexplicable thing was why the girl should be here. Yet her voice sounded hot, eager, faltering with anxiety.

Knyvett stood, hands in pockets, searching his mind for what it knew of Molly Woodruffe.

Sara had always been sorry for her, yet half envious of her nerve and spirit. For the Woodruffes had climbed from depths of poverty and helplessness in a manner only possible to indomitable will. It had been a splendid fight, waged by the mother with the old feminine weapons of wheedling and cajolery, by the daughter with brain and determination.

All Molly's life had consisted of excursions and alarms with her mother, since never was the devil's wedlock of parenthood more viciously interlocked than in the case of these two. It began with looks, for florid, fair-haired Mrs. Woodruffe found her daughter developing into an olive-complexioned girl of the wing-necked, big-eyed type. Molly's eyes, in fact, went with the potted meats on which her father had tried to found a fortune and failed and both were the crosses of Mrs. Woodruffe's existence. Mr. Woodruffe, being responsible for them, had departed early in life for a sphere where potted meats cannot penetrate and where the angelic wings go not ill with ivory skins. But worst of all was the fact that Molly defied the atmosphere of sham which her mother regarded as invigorating ozone. And Mrs. Woodruffe, who considered any sign of power in a woman's face unseemly, found that the quality her child's face expressed was also present in her character. " Mother is such a liar," Molly would say, ostentatiously displaying jars of potted meat.

That had been the beginning: the end was a blank refusal to accept a genteel and silly boarding-school education. Instead, she had forced her mother to pay for class fees in hard-headed subjects, had pinched and pared, had worn an old sailor hat three seasons and had finally taken a good degree in Honours.

Now she spent half her year rushing up and down England, getting up facts and speeches for the Member of Parliament to whom she was secretary. She could pack a bag in ten minutes, grasp the true inwards of a strike in a day, and write the synopsis of a speech in half an hour. In effect, she was known as the quickest worker in her profession, that of devilling. Her salary should have been £500, but she only got £120, for M.P.'s like cheap—and efficient—woman's work as well as do other employers of labour. She could travel and work and play with no signs of fatigue except the blue rims under her eyes. Once only had she enjoyed a rest cure and that was in Holloway, when she went to gaol for a month after an affray at Westminster, since, having no money to pay for her return ticket, Holloway had presented itself as a safe asylum. Therefore, she had grappled with a policeman and afterwards boasted that she put on three pounds in weight during her residence in that squalid spot.

Now the woman who can put on three pounds on prison diet is a thing worth something.

Mrs. Woodruffe had, in fact, hatched an eaglet and not being by any means such a fool as she looked, knew it. She could not, of course, alter the fact, so she spent her time in wondering why she had not given birth to a "womanly" woman. Vaguely reminiscent of scripture, she used to wail: "Looks will fade, and styles change, but womanliness never faileth."

Then she tried something more effective by taking a house in Devonshire and contriving to hoist herself into society mainly by the help of the Herefords, who were distinguished and yet Bohemian. This suited Molly exactly for it gave her an opportunity during holiday times of breathing good air, drinking milk and going to bed early. She had, in fact, being a wise virgin, counted every card in her hand and knew that the trump was physical health. If not beautiful, a woman may always appear distinguished; Molly had no intention whatever of fading before sixty and after that she had already decided how she would pile up her hair and look like a duchess.

It was not for nothing that they were known as the Fighting Family.

"Hard, hard, hard," sighed Mrs. Woodruffe, who always relied on folly as her weapon and never read a novel written in a style more subtle than sign-painting.

And it was this hard woman who went to Bessie Bodinar to know the future! Meanwhile Mr. Knyvett prickled all over his skin at the idea that he was prying in secret places; he felt as mean as a man who has read a locked diary.

But to the Bodinar house there was evidently a back door, for after the clink of coin there followed a silence, the partition door opened and Mrs. Bodinar came in.

"My goodness gracious!" cried she, "and the good gent here all the time! You must please excuse us being all of a caddle, but what with my work and my children, I do say I never have so much as time to put my clothes on."

Her eyes fell on the cradle and she giggled as she lifted it and leaning it against her protuberant body, carried it into the other room.

"A poverty basket this," she said. "Don't you never have nort to do with it. And here I am with my last, last of six living and four buried, born when I was forty-five, in my forty-sixth year. But there, you never know your luck."

Black, protruding eyes, half cunning and half mad, stared from a square head on a short squat neck that projected above a shapeless bosom ill-covered by a pin-fastened bodice. A gilt belt cut her body into two halves.

"Sleep!" said she, "I never sleep scarcely. For 'tis always working all round me."

She grasped at the air.

"And sleep's queer, too, for a body seems to wander here and there. And then they come to me, they that are in need of me. I saw one of my ladies t'other night as plain as I see you, standing by my bed with her furs on. 'Bodinar,' says she, 'I'm in trouble.' And the next day her was here in the flesh sure 'nuff."

The elder girl, a white-faced creature with a flat, wide-spreading nose and close-set, sinister eyes, stood behind her mother. A tiny girl sat pressing pins into a cushion with fierce dents; another child cried from the cradle. Hastily rushing in, Mrs. Bodinar began to rock it to and fro with hard jolts that flung the baby from side to side. The wails never ceasing, she lifted it out and began to unfasten her bodice. The child was at least two years old.

"It's a save," said she, excusing herself.

And Knyvett sat and wondered how a theologian would justify the fate to which this woman's children were born, shut in to superstition, to fear and trickery and lies. The white-faced reader of the crystal might be fourteen. She wore a lace-trimmed blouse and short

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sleeves and plainly longed to be off up street with the lads, but dared not move. Large and fat and white, all the children were; the fœtid air got on his nerves.

"But you wanted a touch of my art," said the woman, and crawling to a table with the child clinging to her she pushed a pack of filthy cards towards him.

"Have you done this sort of thing for long?" asked Knyvett, mechanically shuffling and cutting.

"Ten year, perhaps. My mother did it afore me and her mother afore that. I've heard that never a trawler sailed out in they days, but the skipper 'ud come up for a bit of Gran's art. But times is changed now. 'Tis the bettermost folks that come to me. From all over the country they come, in motor-cars and carriages. And I'm not the only one. One hussy goes up from here to London for six months of the year and has a flat there. But not me! My blackguard of a husband's left me again and I can't traipse about free."

"Mrs. Bodinar," asked Knyvett, "what's your husband like? I met a Bodinar not so long ago."

"And if you said you'd seen 'en this very week to Dartmouth, you'd maybe be telling the truth. But he give me the go-by, the dirty hound."

"And if I can help you to lay hands on him, will you do what I want you to do? No, damn the cards. I didn't come for that."

"Then you're the police?"

"No, I'm not. And I don't mean to do you any harm. But I *do* mean to stop your working more mischief. By some carelessness I was left in the other room——"

"That's Maria's doing. Her'll pay for it."

"I know the young lady you had here. *And so do you*. And I know the man your child described. *And so do you*. No, no names, please——"

He raised his hand to secure silence.

"Now what did you mean by coupling their names in the way you did? What has the girl to do with that man?"

"Why, they was together every day this autumn, boating, in the woods and that."

Knyvett lit a cigarette, conscious of her shrewd eyes on him.

"That so?" he smiled. "You saw them in the crystal, I suppose?"

"Yes, I saw them in the crystal," answered she sullenly.

Suddenly her manner changed completely as, turning to her eldest daughter, she bade her leave the house. Mr. Knyvett began to perceive that there might be several women under Bessie Bodinar's skin.

"You think you've seen my husband?" she asked, when they were alone but for the younger children.

"I believe so," said Knyvett, "a thin-faced man with a reddish beard and a chamois leather bag. He coughs behind the back of his hands and talks of 'mineral wealth'; has a precise way of speaking when he begins; talks of enjoying good health, and that, but when he's up the pole——"

"Talks like a book," interposed Mrs. Bodinar.

"Well, like *some* books."

"That's Simon, then," sighed she.

"And out of the chamois bag," said Knyvett slowly, "he pours a blackish dust——".

"Iss, fay, but 'twas gravel, not dust, as I turned out of his breeches pockets."

A droll notion struck Knyvett and he began to laugh, while Mrs. Bodinar watched him, red-eyed and suspicious.

"Mrs. Bodinar," asked he, "shall we do a deal? You tell me what I want to know and I'll——"

"Find me Simon that I may get my nails into 'en and I'll do anything you want."

"I'll better that. For I'll take you off in the same ship with him. You shall meet on the high seas and go round the world together, if it suits your book."

For all the time his thought was boring like a mole into the matter of Molly Woodruffe; he had it in mind, in fact, to clear the board of all extra pieces. And it struck him that Mrs. Bodinar was dangerously engaged in stoking up too many fires.

"And what do you want?"

"I want to know all you can tell me of the matter of the chamois bag."

But she was paying no attention, for he had apparently struck down on yet another Mrs. Bodinar, the mother woman this time.

"Simon's been my husband for twenty year—off and on," she added grimly. "For he's a wandering cove and one roof and one woman don't suit 'en for long. Once he give out he was wrecked and then he come back after years and——"

"Whistled down the old Toby jug," said Knyvett.

"Then you know that, too?"

"Told it in the 'Valiant Sailor' on Dartmouth quay."

"Ah, Simon, Simon," cried Mrs. Bodinar, suddenly doting like a mother over a dear, but naughty child, "in how many bars hath a' told that, I wonder?"

"What do you know about that chamois bag?"

"Chamois bag," said she, "why, you've got that on the brain, sir. I know he told up a lot of old trade about the gold-dust he'd found. Used to go round bragging that he could make any man's fortune that he liked. But his breeches pockets were full of gravel and he'd a bit of paper with lines on it in his sea-chest. That I burnt, for 'twas mucksy old trade."

"Do you believe that by any chance there might be some truth in his story?"

"Well, Simon's a liar, but he isn't a liar all through, as you mid say."

"I'm no nearer," said Knyvett, pacing up and down. "For I knew that before. But you've done your best. I'll be frank. We're getting ready to send out an expedition to look for the gold your husband talks of. Apparently we're the first people he's found, after years of gab, to take him seriously."

"You'll promise you'll put me so's Bodinar can't get away if I tell all I know?"

"I promise."

"Sir, sir," her face worked, "you don't know what I've gone through. I've been nigh mad over it all, for it always seemed to me I'd done it. It's Simon. Down and down he's been going all these years. Not so many years ago he was cox of a lifeboat, trusted, up in the world. There wasn't a finer seaman anywhere. Glad to get 'en they was, for a hard bit of work. Then he came down, step by step, till he's thankful to get fifteen shilling a week. 'Twas my queer trade partly. He hated it, but I'd been used to it all my life. Couldn't do without the fortune-telling, but it turned 'en sickish, he used to say. And yet I can manage 'en better'n anybody, when I've got 'en by me. And many the time, when I've heard some other woman's man go wambling down the street, all drinky, I've wondered what my poor Sim was doing."

"But your trade?"

"I'll give it up though 'tis in my blood. I will, if you'll put me so's I can get to Simon. You can't manage 'en without me. And though it brings heaving in my innerds so much as to look at the sea, I'll put away the chillern to my sister's and go."

"But the gold-dust?"

"I'll worm it out of 'en. I'd gie my soul to the old black man to get Sim back, I would."

She laid a hand on his arm, her face fiery red and the sweat shining on her forehead.

"Can 'ee bring it to pass, sir?"

Her attitude was full of a certain truthfulness, due in part to her reliance on his manhood and his wealth; he belonged, she knew, to those who get things done.

"Yes," said Knyvett. Then he laughed, for there are fools who consider working folks simple.

He wandered down to the road that winds above the quay. In the midst of the dense mass of vessels in harbour one trawler was puffing out clouds of steam. From the forest of masts and shaggy trawls came the hoarse cries of men and the clank of moving gear. Then, like a huge bat's wing, a dark sail was jerked aloft.

Pencils of quivering light stretched across the water of the outer harbour, reflections from the houses on the cliff. Around the great bay the shore lights faded into dim channel distances whence came the multitudinous voice of the sea. A siren hooted three times from the coal-hulks that bristled with black derrick arms. A hissing tug bustled across the stillness. Like a yellow shutter the traceried window of St. Peter the Fisherman glowed from the dull fronts of the mass of houses above him; across it he could see the shadow of a beam in the ceiling. It was the outward sign of the inward fear of the Unknown.

For one need not go to a savage African tribe to learn how men may dread the forces of nature. Even here they are perfectly aware that it won't do to defy the Something back of the veil, which is all that the wisest of us can affirm as yet; hence the piety that is two-thirds superstition. Many a boat of the Brixham fleet will draw up a trawl of a Saturday night in mid-ocean and not let it down till midnight Sunday night. Yet they never pull the unknown dead aboard, even though it has been in the water but an hour or so, lest the legal expenses of burial should fall on the boat's crew, since it is the devil, not the ghost, that is feared in this town. Every sea-faring place has its special cult, as well as its own fishing-grounds and peculiar brand of morality.

The narrow courts and wynds are full of terrors; up that steep stairway by the Coffin House no one must walk on a New Year's Eve, for an unseen spirit hurls one back, leaving the body black and blue from conflict. Up above the raised stone stairway called the Overgang is a house where a doorway opened three times without human touch on the night when four boats of the fleet went down in a hurricane. When Christmas Eve was over the wives gave up hope of ever seeing their men again, but the only certain tidings that came was the thrice-opened door of one man's home.

Molly Woodruffe in her life of constant bustle was so used to unexpected meetings that she showed no surprise when Knyvett appeared at her elbow as she leant over the low wall above the harbour. As she used to put it forcibly: the Archangel Gabriel in the hall of Hades would scarcely have caused her a start. But when Billy saw how white and dispirited the girl looked, he marvelled at the strange things women carry under their silence, that silence of the centuries which is so profound that when it is broken their voice sounds like a cry.

But he was practical, too, and insisted on finding a tea-shop. On the quay-front, therefore, with the protuberant corporation of William of Orange like a flying buttress outside, they sat in the window over a meal, while the cat crept into her arms. A weird black creature, with yellow eyes, he clung to the girl's breast, with cold hind toes curled up on her palms and damp nose against her cheek. A low-spirited, cringing thing he was, who might have been a man imprisoned for his sins in the form of a beast that crawls on his belly. It was ugly; Billy tore it away from her, for he remembered Mrs. Bodinar.

"I've been trying to touch the feet of the rainbow to-night," said Molly at last when the "drunkard's tea" he made her drink had turned the world to a more bearable place. "Don't you know how children always want to get to the place where the blues and greens strike the earth? It is so hard to wait for nice things. You want to hurry up and get to them—quick."

He remembered what he heard someone say of her: was any girl ever as innocent as that girl looks? It was because of that memory that he dared to be sincere:

"Ah," he said slowly, "one doesn't get there till another person's life is as dear to one as one's own. And that doesn't come about in a year or a day. I fancy many a fat grocer and his wife know more about it than your young lover."

"Always man and woman, of course?" she sneered.

"Not always. But most often. Which is perhaps why man and woman are. Then it stretches to children—and so outwards. From the small tie to the large."

"Yes, always a tie, always chains. That's true, anyway, if nothing else is."

"No; not chains. Welding together. Fusion."

"Worse than ever!" she laughed. Then suddenly cooed.

"What a nice man you are!"

He laughed, started and blushed, looking at her kindly, the more so for the trap-door through which he had gazed unwillingly into her private thought-world, the world we hide so jealously—and reveal so clearly.

Then the great English instinct, the passion for duty, bit him fiercely. For she wanted help so badly; yet how could he give it, without hurting her cruelly? No man is so quixotically keen on doing his duty as the free lance who refuses to acknowledge any claims. Since he has a way of finding duties where the man of law and order with a suburban villa and five children to maintain would comfortably pass by on the other side. For Quixotes therefore, thank Heaven; provided of course that they give the man-trap of priggishness a wide berth.

"Anyway," said Knyvett to himself, "I can kidnap Mrs. Bodinar. Confound her!"

Yet his face softened, even to Mrs. Bodinar, although he could scarcely forgive her the fat white children, like anæmic toads.

Then Molly herself gave him a lead, for she was, after all, a transparent person who could not keep her tongue off the person most in her thoughts.

"I've been to a fortune teller," she cried, "who described Archer Bellew to me exactly. I wonder how far it's true that things which are going to happen already *are*, so it's only an accident that one can't see them in front of one."

Then her face flushed scarlet, for in the flash of his eyes and the quick veiling of them, she saw how she had revealed herself. Archer Bellew *was*—in the things that were prepared for her. Yet Archer Bellew was Sara's husband.

He covered her lapse by remarking quietly:

"Of course the woman knows all the gossip. And Bellew bulks large in people's fancies down here, no doubt."

"And everywhere," she answered curtly. "There are some people everyone talks about. But of course you take his wife's side."

"Why?"

"Gracious! Mr. Knyvett, you don't want me to explain?"

It was the first time he had thought her vulgar.

"Of course," she continued, "that marriage was all wrong. He was engaged to Margaret Rossiter, you know, when Mr. Hereford put his spoke in the wheel and carried him off for Sara."

"Margaret Rossiter, the artist ?"

"Yes, of course. No one seems to know exactly why it was broken off. But, anyway, it's made Margaret famous. Queer, wasn't it, that the Herefords, who are so incurably dilettante in general and who never get anything done because nothing's quite exquisite enough to satisfy them, should have pulled off a marriage with such a man ? But old Mr. Hereford evidently used up all the will in that family. They've run short of it ever since."

She was her cheerful, mocking self once more.

"So that's how the Herefords strike you ?" said he.

"Of course. So they do everybody. I call it the Amazing Marriage. But if I'd Sara Bellew's talent for music, I'd never stay down here to be neglected by my husband. And look at Anne ! Of course she has knocked off her medical work and come home. She wouldn't be a Hereford if she persevered."

Infinite scorn rang in her voice. Every tone said : "Look at me for a contrast."

"But the Bellew ménage is bound to go smash," she concluded, as they turned up the street to the station.

"You think so ?" he asked, his thoughts running hither and thither like the wood lice when their stone is overturned.

"Don't you ?" she snapped. "Oh, what an atmosphere of lies and hypocrisy we live in ! Why should marriage in England be the one thing in which you may not confess you've made a mistake and begin over again ? They all talk as if it was divorce, open break, that mattered, when it's the thing that brought about the divorce which is all that matters. But it's all right so long as you don't put things as right as they can be put, fair and square and open, all right as long as you don't get in the papers. Don't you agree ?"

"Absolutely. Divorce doesn't take place when the decree is made absolute, but when two people look different ways. But it's all wrong to let passion settle the thing. It should be deliberate, reasoned choice that does it, choice that looks all ways, that judges when the tie is slavery."

"That's impossible."

"It shouldn't be. We reason when we build bridges, we reason when we build states. We must reason ever so much more carefully when we wreck old homes to build new ones."

The girl was startled at his hard tones which bespoke in all their special pleading so deep an emotion. Then the man's hatred of the explicit overcame him and he shied from what he meant to say, which was: "Don't burn your fingers for a piece of folly."

What he actually said, was:

"But all this can be nothing to you."

Then the train carried her away.

CHAPTER VI

SPRINGES TO CATCH WOODCOCKS: IN THIS A MAN OF BELIAL COMES HOME

"I ONLY want to see my little girl with someone to look after her," wailed Mrs. Woodruffe, thinking with horror of the ruffled turkey-cock she would presently be ushering into the drawing-room at Craneham.

Her bright colour seemed to have been laid on in streaks that had run; her clothes always shone with newness and bristled with stiffness, while her opinions changed with the seasons and her toupets. A tightly-corseted woman in general, she was proportionately relaxed in moments of abandon.

"Looked after! You know I don't want to be looked after. You make me sick," snapped Molly. "No, they didn't talk like that when you were young, because they were such liars then."

"You've not an atom of proper respect for your mother," shrilled Mrs. Woodruffe.

"No, I've not. Why should I? A good many years ago you found yourself obliged to put up with some discomfort in bringing me into the world, but I don't see why that should make me endure treatment from you that I wouldn't take from anybody else."

"Molly! will you overthrow all the ten commandments?"

"Every blessed one of them if they teach rot. All you want to do is to use me to boost yourself up in the world by marrying me well. And then you turn round and ask me to be grateful for it. Well, I'm not."

For these two time and space had contracted to the incessant repetition of water-dropping. Yet, although the mother's face was flushed and her hands were trembling, her anger was peevish rather than murderous, for she belonged to a generation that seems to regard domestic brawls as in the order of nature.

"You really are," cried she, "the most irritating girl ever born. Here am I, straining every nerve for you, and you do nothing but set your face like a flint and your feet like a mule."

"But I don't want you to strain every nerve for me. I wouldn't have you do anything so indecent," drawled Molly.

"Now I suppose you think you've said something clever. But it's quite thrown away upon me."

"I'm perfectly aware of that, mother."

White-capped and foam-flecked, the bay gleamed blue beyond the hedges between which they walked, heated and furious, on the way up to pay a call on the Herefords. Mrs. Woodruffe's anger had a serpentine expression about it; she placed hand on hip and darted her head forward with each venomous sentence.

"And," continued the girl, "if ever I'm driven to something desperate, it'll be your doing and nobody else's."

"And it's all for your sake that I'm toiling up the hill in the afternoon sun," wailed the poor lady. "But oat

it's so ostentatious to bring out the carriage for such a little way. And I do so detest ostentation. But I positively must have the Craneham people for the party. Archer Bellew is such a draw, for everybody talks about him, and her music helps the people to talk. Though really the last time Sara Bellew played, I almost made up my mind never to ask her again. It was positively just like a professional, from the way she walked up to the piano to the way she ran her hand over the keys. She might actually have been on a public platform. Nothing could possibly have been more vulgar."

"Mrs. Bellew is practically a professional, of course. And it's great cheek in us to ask her to play for nothing. If she were a man she'd send in a thumping cheque for 'professional services.'"

"You really do make me quite faint, Molly," said Mrs. Woodruffe, purple with aggravation, fear and exercise. "You do say such absolutely preposterous things. *We* are not the people to know professionals."

"We're not. You're right. But Archer Bellew won't come. You surely don't imagine that he would. He's much too big a gun to prop such a one-horse-shay sort of affair."

"Then you must get him to. You owe it to me to make my social efforts a success. They're all for you."

"Stop that, mother. It's—damnable."

"Well, it's the truth. And you're always making a great to-do about telling *that*, so why shouldn't *I* tell the truth sometimes. And let me tell you this, that in my days the girls were not the raging, tearing termagants they are nowadays, nor did they even *think* the horrors you do."

"No, of course not. They didn't think at all."

"But you must talk to Mr. Bellew and get him to come. It'll make all the difference if he does. A man will do a great deal to please a girl and you can be very persuasive when you like. That is what is so annoying about you, Molly, with a little care and trouble you might be quite a *persona grata* in the circles——"

"For goodness' sake, be quiet, mother. You know perfectly well that I will never worm, nor wriggle, nor wheedle——"

"Nor do anything your mother asks. There's none but One above who could say what a trial you've been to me."

Then she heard a man's footsteps coming up behind and turning, found Billy Knyvett at her elbow. A transformation followed and she cried:

"Dear me, Mr. Knyvett, how perfectly charming to find you bound for the same place. We have been hoping you would find time to look in on us, but you are a bad man. You haven't been near us and not a sign of you anywhere. And we heard such lurid stories about your plans. Something about buried treasure and a weird person who has a secret hoard and is going to guide you to it. Do, do, I beg you, be careful that he doesn't murder you. What in the world would Mrs. Bellew do without you? or, indeed, for the matter of that, any of us? And I hear that Mr. Westlake is positively giving up his mission work to buccaneer. I never heard of anything so romantic and wicked in my life. We've never been able to go down on a Sunday to hear him preach to his quaint crew of fishermen, though I've often said to Molly, 'Positively, love, I must borrow the housekeeper's dress and go down to hear poor dear Mr. Westlake, or we ought to have him up to dinner.' But somehow time slipped by and we did neither the one nor the other. Perhaps it was that I am so foolishly fastidious about wearing other people's clothes. I never feel it's quite a clean thing, do you know, to wear furs, for after all, whatever cleaning process they may have gone through, they were once worn by an animal, probably one of most unpleasant habits. But then I am so silly about things, Molly laughs at me. She is such a strong-minded girl, never minds at hotels whether her room is near mine or not, though I always insist on seeing that she locks her door. I wonder how many times, Molly dear, your old mother has pattered down the passage—and they do have such long passages in hotels now, don't they?—and called to you: 'Molly, Molly, is your door locked, my darling?' A mother's anxiety, you know, just a silly old hen fluttering over her one chick."

She ran down, with just the suspicion of a tear in her eye.

"Huh!" snorted Molly; Mr. Knyvett gave her a warm glance of fellowship which delighted Mrs. Woodruffe's unconscious heart. It was so charming to see Molly sweet—to the right person.

It was with her customary sensation of anger and humiliation that Molly followed her mother into the Hereford drawing-room. As a counterfoil to Mrs. Woodruffe's patter, she was in the habit of adopting a languid manner accompanied by half-shut eyes and a gaze down her nose.

The object of this visit was immediately apparent; at the Woodruffe party Sara's music, her husband's fame, "and what a brilliant man he is," Mr. Hereford's urbanity, and Mr. Knyvett's nimbus of position were to burn like sacred lamps before the shrine of the Woodruffe gentility.

"I can't answer for my husband," said Sara, "for he is still away, but I shall be very glad to come."

"And to play! Dear Mrs. Bellew, we cannot possibly let you off. Such a cachet! It will be like having Paderewski or Madame Schumann within our portals. Do, do, let me entreat you. And if I might suggest before the lovely Brahms you play so exquisitely, just some Beethoven—perhaps the Kreutzer Sonata."

She was catching wildly at the tail of culture.

"Or some little trifle of that sort," laughed Molly. "I may remark in passing that mother doesn't really want you to exhaust yourself in going through Beethoven. She is just throwing out suggestions. The Kreutzer and perhaps the Moonlight and of course the Eroica Symphony."

There was a bitterness in her manner that everyone felt, save old Vin Hereford, who purred delightedly.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "how delightful it is to go back to someone who appreciates the fine old intellectual tradition of the great German age. But the Kreutzer is perhaps just a little—eh? It has almost as many literary associations now as Tannhäuser itself. I should suggest something without that aroma, that savour."

Mrs. Woodruffe's prominent eyes gleamed. She remembered now that there was something quite improper connected with the Kreutzer Sonata.

"No, no, of course not," she cried. "Of course one wouldn't wish dear Mrs. Bellew to play it. It was only the first name that came into my head. I have really such a bad memory for names nowadays that I almost fear I must be suffering from Anno Domini. Funny, isn't it, with not a grey hair yet showing?"

Paralysed, everyone watched her, save old Vin, who was dozing.

"The Kreutzer," said Knyvett, delivering himself of a ghastly platitude, "is a fine sonata."

"Oh, but I quite understand. But really, one has to think so much nowadays before one opens one's lips that a long conversation brings one in danger of nervous prostration."

Anne laughed. It was such a painful cachinnation that it attracted Mrs. Woodruffe's special notice. She felt vicious.

"And you, Miss Hereford, with your medical studies! What dreadful secrets you must know."

"Not anything nearly so dreadful as the things some people imagine," said Anne grimly, feeling very much as though she wanted to stamp on a beetle.

Molly glanced at her fiercely. She, too, shared the sentiment. Only, after all, the beetle was her mother. Nobody but herself must be allowed to attack.

"But you seem to be able to follow their imagining easily," she snapped.

"Brain disease," said Anne, "is a part of our course."

Sara interposed hastily with a question as to date. "But for my husband, I can't say. He isn't at home now."

"There he is," said Molly, bowing to someone who passed the window. She flushed and glared defiantly at

Anne. They waited, but no Archer appeared, though they heard his step in the hall.

"The rude man!" lilted Mrs. Woodruffe. "He's not coming in, though he saw you in the window, Molly. And last autumn we saw a great deal of him."

"He's gone to his study," remarked Anne maliciously.

"Ah, Molly, go down and rout him out. Make him say he'll come to us. I'll put 'To meet the famous author, Mr. Archer Bellew,' on the cards, if only he'll come. So many people want to meet him. Do let her go, Mrs. Bellew. He'll jump on her, but he'll forgive. He's really quite fond of Molly."

"Don't be absurd, mother."

"But you know I'm always absurd. It's my métier. Come, Molly, run away; there's a good child. Say 'Tally-ho' when you run him to earth."

"I'll show you the way," said Anne maliciously.

Outside the door, the two girls stood with pulses beating and feet tapping. Molly plunged her hands deep in her flat muff with a mocking moue under her bell-shaped hat of shining black satin.

"You need not show me," she said haughtily; "I know Mr. Bellew's study quite well. I've no need whatever of a chaperone. And you're making a great mistake in being rude to Us."

Anne recognised the greatness of the sacrifice implied in that "Us," in that identification of the girl with her mother. She felt heartily ashamed of herself.

"I'm sorry," she said humbly; "I've been a beast."

"Oh," cried Molly, beginning to tremble, "I feel wild, desperate. I don't mind what I do with myself. I always say I never will come home again. It all gets on my nerves so and I behave badly and feel so mean, so dirty, to think of what I've said. And yet you can't cut yourself quite adrift from where you started, can you?"

"No," said Anne, "and somehow or other I suppose we've earned our parents."

"Why can't we humans be like that?" cried Molly, as they stood in the window watching the sunlight that flashed on the sheen of budding trees. "We're just the only ugly things in the world. And I do so long for—something different. You know how you feel when you've read a wonderful story or some splendid line of verse. You want it to be all like that. And then you come back to your everyday self. And it's all gone. It was only a dream."

"Beauty is like joy," said Anne, "a thing just tucked away, a secret you look at every now and then when you're busiest. Ten days hence you're going to see someone; or you've just done a good stroke of work. Then your heart sings. That's how it is."

"Just a gleam," said Molly.

"Just a gleam, something come over the border from a wonderful world where we really belong perhaps. Who knows?"

Like a child Molly put up her face.

"We'll be friends," asked she, "whatever I do?"

"Whatever you do," laughed Anne in her bustling way. "I don't give up my friends for any sort of badness. That's not me. It's for better, for worse, that I take 'em. But I'm truly sorry I was so rude just now."

"Oh, never mind. It's the way decent people must feel about us. But I won't go in and see Mr. Bellew. You go and I'll wait here for you."

"There's no harm in your going, my dear. It would please your mother so much to have him and there's no reason whatever why he shouldn't, for once in his life, do a kindness for somebody."

Molly smiled wanly and then went undulating down the passage to the study, to emerge ten minutes later, bright-eyed, revivified. Precisely the effect had been wrought on her that is worked on a man by dinner and wine. Between her and the fret of existence had come a pleasant illusion of well-being. And Archer Bellew would be at the party; that at any rate was assured.

Meanwhile in the drawing-room, Mrs. Woodruffe had been trying to bring off a *coup* on her own account. Heaven knows what visions crowded her mind of great ladies with negro slaves behind them bearing prayer-books, but she craved a favour of Mr. Knyvett—the services of Cornelius to assist, at any rate by his presence, at her supper. Mrs. Woodruffe was one of the women who cannot have a neighbour of any sort without borrowing teacups or clothes-brushes.

"So chic!" exclaimed she, "a gigantic African by the sideboard. It will create quite a sensation and he has *such* a pleasant smile. Somehow or other, I'm sure I don't know why, but it always reminds me of what the whiting said to the snail. You will be good, Mr. Knyvett, and lend me Cornelius?"

She leant forward, hands outstretched.

Mr. Hereford had caught the name. Rousing himself from his half doze, he began to preach:

"Cornelius, my dear lady," said he, "has a great task to perform. Our racial efficiency greatly needs the assistance of the full-blooded African strain. To say nothing of any other matter, it would be most beneficial to English literature to infuse into it something more exotic. I trust," he purred, turning to Billy, "that he's doing his duty manfully while he's in port. I should let him ashore as often as possible."

Horror stalked among the company as a pestilence that walketh at noonday. Mrs. Woodruffe, her face rigid, sat wondering what barbaric horror she was going to introduce into her fashionable sheepfold. Anne laughed outright. Only Sara had presence of mind enough to murmur:

"Cornelius' offspring aren't likely to be literary."

Mr. Hereford felt contradicted.

"You talk like a fool, Sara," snapped he. "Into what strange channels does not race flow? And I've always noticed that a full-blooded strain means literary genius in a nation. Look, for instance, at the Tartar nose of the Russians—and the Tartar strength in their books. And why is it that the Frenchman is the only Western that can paint the East? Don't tell me it's Latin. It's the memory of hot sands, of hotter lusts."

Mrs. Woodruffe with a rattling of muff chains and bangles protested and prepared to create a bustle. But everybody else sat spellbound.

"For nobody has yet realised," he continued, "the influence of the negro strain in French blood. So let Cornelius go ashore. Ages hence some romance may owe its power to him."

For once the rustling newness of Mrs. Woodruffe's garments was more comforting than felt slippers to an invalid's ear. In the bustle of her departure was effaced the phantom of old Hereford's eugenic speculations. When at last the door closed behind her:

"Oh, Lord," cried Anne, sitting on the window-seat preparatory to a vault over it on to the terrace, "if we weren't up in the world, would she ever put her nose inside this house again? Dear old Cornelius. I positively love him. And his meringues are worth all the 'Voyages en Orient' of his potential offspring over and over again."

Then she vanished into the garden and Sara went down the hall to her husband's study.

He was standing with his back to her, tapping meditatively on the book shelves. His were the nervous, long-fingered hands that play incessantly with something, from bread-pills on the dinner-table to cigarettes and watch-chain. A set of small brown books faced him, and taking one down he began to turn over the pages. Like all readers he knew instinctively on which side of the page was the quotation he wanted:

"But only that is strong within us which remains even for ourselves but a half-suspected secret."

And it is precisely that half-suspected secret which the novelist reveals to the world. For when it comes to revelation, the light that beats upon a throne is nothing compared to the light that radiates from a printed page. Of this Archer Bellew had become aware as he turned over the press-cuttings that awaited him. His cigarette puffed its life away like grass withering in a hot oven.

Then he turned and saw his wife; his pointed Mephistophelian eyebrows had a way of running upwards towards his temples in a habit that had driven deep horizontal wrinkles into his forehead. It gave him a scared expression that suggested a startled woodland thing; nor was the impression contradicted by the sideways poise of an oval head on a long neck.

"And so there you are," he exclaimed. "What do you think of these?" He nodded towards the little pile of cuttings on the writing-desk. "Damned impudence, I call it."

"Did you expect anything else?" In the shrug of her shoulders there was a haughtiness that she reserved for her husband.

"Well, now, that's a nice wifely thing to say!"

"But if you *will* fly in the face of all the conventions, of all the prejudices."

"I painted the picture of a woman, a real woman, that's all. A woman full of revolt, of the intention to kick herself free of every idea that keeps women patient and humble."

"Just so. But you see the reviewers, like most other people, prefer women to be humble and patient. So of course they rage and call it wicked."

"It's studied from life," he said maliciously, "from a close, intimate study, in fact."

"So I thought," she answered quietly. If she felt angry, she showed no faintest sign of it. But, as always when these two were together, the mental temperature of the room was distinctly warm.

"From Anne, perhaps?" he sneered. "She's rather of that type, the revolting."

"Not in the least."

In attacking Anne he had approached a subject on which she could not keep calm.

"Anne is revolting from the very thing your heroine delights in. Anne wants to work, to be recognised as valuable for something else than merely to please men. Your woman wants to live openly, instead of secretly, just for nothing else—to please herself first by pleasing men. Anne wants to put all that into the background. There are thousands like Anne and a mere handful like your woman, a handful who will try to creep in under Anne's banner. Anne is austere; your woman is a wanton, aping the freedom of austerity. That's why your book is such a lie, for it's taken as typical."

"You say it's drawn from life. From whom?" he asked angrily.

"I don't know."

"Do you want to?"

She hesitated, gazing straight at him, for she was an extremely truthful woman, truthful to a hair. And all the while he was irritably pressing on the nerve that hurt him, for he was very sensitive to blame, very much led by his pleasure in other people's approbation of him. Moreover, he resented strongly any attitude of criticism in the women that belonged to him. It was that which had always put him wrong with Sara, who unconsciously judged and weighed as carefully as an analytical chemist.

"One part of you wants to know and the other fears; that's about it, isn't it?" he said, impatiently rolling a cigarette, with fingers that spilt the tobacco.

"Yes," he added deliberately, "it was drawn from life."

She quivered as though he had struck her, not at the words so much as at the implication involved in them. He was satisfied for a second, and then repentant. Rising, he put a hand gently on her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Sara, I'm sorry. But you're not very human, are you?"

She looked up at him, her lips trembling.

"I don't know, Archer, but I seem to be like someone passing his hand over a wall to find a hidden spring."

"To let yourself out by?"

"I don't understand myself one bit," she cried.

"Look at me, Sara," he said, dropping his hands heavily on her shoulders.

He had bright, compelling eyes. She felt as though they read her through and through and longed to ask him what he found there, but dared not.

"The sleeping beauty," he remarked, laughing quite kindly. "How long have we been married, child?"

"Ten years next May," she answered promptly.

"Is it so long? I didn't realise that."

Then they sat on in a silence that grew oppressive. It was always the same. Talk seemed to dry up, ideas to wither when they were together. Sara was longing to get herself out of the room and Archer to see her go, but neither knew how to achieve the move. At last she stirred restlessly and Archer yawned.

"Well, I must get to my letters."

"And that's the sort of reception I come home to every time," he said aloud, as he swung himself into his swivel writing-chair. "No wonder the old saints and monks lived to a ripe old age with no women to plague 'em. The Lords of Misrule, that's what women are—sirens, termagants, shrews or schemers, the whole boiling of 'em."

A strong lover of order, his household annoyed him, for he knew himself to be a mismated man and he hated mismating as cordially as ever old Vin Hereford hated two colours that swore. And it was not only his personal relationship with Sara; it was the attitude of the house towards him that stimulated every nerve of irritation in him whenever he crossed the threshold of it. Craneham was to him the hall of Rhadamanthus, where everybody sat in judgment, from Elizabeth upwards.

Born in the Far West, in that Penwith of the Cornishmen that breeds a stock peculiarly racial and vivid, his earliest memories were of the land of the moving mists that, sea-born, blot out cornland and moor even in the height of summer as though under the smeary fingers of a giant. At the age when nature is plastic to all impressions he had lived in the back rooms of a small grocer's shop where trade names of soaps and candles, of marmalades and blackings, took the place of the sines and cosines, the Greek verbs and Latin verse of better-born boys. Yet he had found his ecstasy in the hymn-singing of white-faced, stunted miners whose faith poised itself on a tight-rope over the fires of the Pit.

In a wayside chapel, like a mighty wind, there had come upon him a sense of his own powers as he rose and bore testimony, preaching the message "repent ye." For his power was emotional more than mental, calling for the stimulus of the quickened nerve that wakes best under the magnetic appeal of the crowd; in a word, he was speaker, rather than writer. He awoke on a lark-singing sunny morning amid the smell of varnish and broadcloth, and the most joyful thought that came to him was the idea of that cleansing hell of remorse which awaits the sinner.

Other powers awoke rapidly; the swing of a verse came with the roar of the waves on the cliff; a curious ancestral story—memory, one had almost called it—was recalled in simple, primitive words. Finally, his descriptive articles attracted notice and he walked the streets of St. Just with, as he fancied, the neighbours' eyes glued to his back. The first book was full, as first books often are, of all the joys that ever he had known; no wonder it was a success.

Then he met Vin Hereford at a public literary dinner. It was a time when the star of simplicity was in the ascendant in Hereford's horoscope, when a dinner of herbs was to be preferred to the richest slice of Strasbourg pâté. He therefore invited Bellew to his house, rejoicing in the memory of the back shop and finding a subtle attraction in the memory of Cheddar and "Rising Sun," of "Nugget" blacking and "England's Glory" matches. Sara was even carried off on a pilgrimage to the shrine of genius, wherein, in fact, father and daughter joyfully bought mixed biscuits.

Flattered, intoxicated, dazzled by the notice of a man whose house in those days was haunted by well-known people, Bellew only saw Sara's eyes through a haze of wonder and delight. Old landmarks disappeared beneath the fog; all obligations were forgotten, thrust away down beneath the surface along with other Bohemian memories. Marriage with Sara appeared like an accolade given to a knight, an accolade that not only made him free of the world of gentlehood, but that turned the key on the baser side of his fire-hot nature.

In one kind of power the thoughts, the very bodily organs, glow with a stormy life that often seems demoniac to calmer natures. And when life raged in Archer Bellew he wavered in its grip like a flame in the wind. But when the fit was over, there was always the same deep horror of the sin, a horror that went down to join other bitter memories. For to Archer Bellew it was sin, this incessant waxing and waning of the moon of his desires; he compounded with no flaws by talking modern sophistry. At bottom he always remained the Cornishman who had preached hell in a wayside chapel. Yet no sense of sin could throw salt on the flame of his craving, whether for woman or ideas.

Only Vin Hereford had succeeded in choking both desire and repentance with damp ash. For Chrysostom, with his specious pleasure-loving talk, had wrapped his son-in-law in literary languor, imbuing him, where his own actions were concerned, with philosophic irony. The moral probe of northern morality was a thing to scorn, said the old Hedonist, for in an artist lawlessness was salt and savour to the blood. It was d'Annunzio, and not Björnson or Tolstoi, who presided in Vin Hereford's literary hierarchy.

The instinct of Elizabeth was right; the books of the old Monsieur had much to answer for.

Yet Bellew could not entirely escape either from his upbringing or from that passionate craving for a better way of life that dances like an *ignis fatuus* before the modern world. Full as he was of the contrast between what life is and what it might be, he studied each human tangle as minutely as though it were a section in a microscope. Whereby, of course, he dealt in false values, since all real stories are like figures in a tapestry, half-meaningless without their background.

Notwithstanding his irregularities, in his own life he remained a Puritan by instinct. For just as he always found it impossible to work in a dusty, untidy room, with one side of his nature he hated the moral dust that had gathered over his days. To-night, as he had done hundreds of times before, he went upstairs, bathed from head to foot, and put on entirely fresh garments in the attempt to feel clean.

His ideal was straight, four-square action; clean living and intense personal probity. Never an hour wasted, never a thought astray.

But after dinner the front door banged behind him.

He had gone out, since a pleasant sense of an idyll to be continued was dancing in front of his nose.

Late that night Mrs. Woodruffe knocked smartly at her daughter's door; being a woman who economised behind the scenes, she was in a maize-coloured dressing-gown that stood distinctly in need of soap and water.

"Your waist is positively huge," grumbled she, sinking into a rocking chair and covering her eyes to shield them from the overhead electric light that shone like a beacon across the garden. "You might draw your corsets in a good two inches more without hurting yourself in the least. Why, when I was your age a man could have spanned my waist with his two hands."

When specially moved, Mrs. Woodruffe always went for her opponent's waist; it was her method of hitting below the belt.

"I don't invite gymnastic feats of that kind, mother. Nowadays we leave that kind of thing to barmaids."

"You're a bad girl, Molly. You should ask God to change your heart. But Stephen Anerley's coming down. He'll be here in time for the party."

"And I specially didn't want him," exclaimed Molly, tapping the floor angrily.

"And I specially did," retorted her mother. "But mind you have a clear idea in your head what you're going to do. There'll be Knyvett and Anerley, and that writing fellow will do for a decoy. And if you don't catch one or other of the two, you must be an absolute fool. Only, for goodness' sake, whatever you do, don't overdo your part."

Much the same horror turned the girl dumb as when one sees some travesty of the human in a mouthing idiot. Then she opened the door and, standing with her fingers on the handle, said quietly:

"Please go, mother. Else I shall say something that had better *not* be said."

And obeying the look in the girl's face, her mother went. She always yielded the field at a look of white-hot anger.

"And that's the sort of thing I've had to bear all my life," cried Molly, flinging herself across the writing-table by the window.

Yet there was a kind of comfort in this sordid atmosphere, for after all it offered some excuse. Seen in this light it seemed very much like the faintness which authorises dram-drinking. From excuse-finding the next step was self-glorification; Molly took it, until she had persuaded herself that to coquette with Bellew was a fine thing, since so to mock the proprieties was to defy the smug respectability, the innate rottenness of her mother's code. A small person, ill-armed and weak, she, Molly Woodruffe, went forth to meet a dragon belching flame, the Apollyon, to wit, of hypocrisy.

Then she was ashamed, owning a more honest impulse, for was she not after all one of the great army of women who are pledged to the day of better things for their sex? The little doctor, Anne Hereford, had quaint moments of exaltation; in one she had said, almost shamefaced, yet persisting: "Liberty is coming for us women, but we've got to prove we're worthy of it. We're going everywhere, free women after centuries of servitude. But we're going into such dark places that we must be sure always to take our own light with us."

Conscience-stricken, Molly shrank back on herself, for she always acknowledged the spell of the wind as it blew from every quarter.

The stupidity of her mother's ideas had bred in her an immense admiration for great men, meaning by that men of paragraphs, gossip, and photographs. Authors, actors, publishers, these breathed, for her, the air of the heights. Politicians, however, were nothing accounted of, for she had seen the strings that pulled them. Had she been a servant girl she would have devoured novelettes; being of another class, she fell a victim to the curious subterranean underflow of sentimentality which in these days reveals itself in the romantic biographies that flood the book market. For our novelists may reduce life and love to the bare bones, picking every shred of romance from the carcase, but our memoir writers only pad it the more thickly with succulence of sentiment. *Vive* *l'amour*, cry the chroniclers of the past, while the historians of the present are declaring it to be dead and buried—save as a device of nature. Hence the bones of de Musset, of Chateaubriand filled the airy chambers of Molly's head, till she saw herself as a *grande amoureuse*, a daughter of man visited by some Son of the Morning.

Now the only Son of the Morning with whom she had any personal acquaintance was Archer Bellew. And that would mean a short bliss, a quick extinction, and for afterwards, a memory. She was quite clear as to this, for though she might don the cap and bells of a fool, she would wear it but as livery.

Stephen Anerley meant something quite different. It would be Stephen all through, pink-faced Stephen, rosy in the gills, with a tall hat on Sunday and a perfectly implacable intention of arranging his life to his liking and not to hers. After five years of treading the narrow path with him she would only be "Anerley's wife," with for object, his elevation up the rungs of the ladder that led to an income in four figures; with for joy, his children; with for duties, his Saturday dinners to fellow-journalists, his digestion, his clothes, even his blue pots. All the world of struggle and zest, of fighting for her own hand would be gone; it would be all "Stephenised" and she a secondary figure.

Now she was not at all sure that she had a genius for the secondary. Yet after all, that way came the sound of children's voices. She could hear them in the firelight, while they all waited for the sound of Stephen's key in the lock—to set things moving again. For to that she would have come by then.

But there was another alternative—to go on preparing speeches for which others gained the kudos. Still secondary, it seemed—and not quite so sweet. The lusty patter of bare fat feet, feet that curled in the palm of the hand, was a pleasant undertone to one's thoughts in comparison. And Stephen Anerley would be here in time for the party.

Just at that moment there came from below three notes whistled softly in a minor cadence. Pressing her face closer on her arms, Molly waited and lay still. The notes were repeated, but she never moved. Then she heard the sound of receding footsteps and the whistle died away.

For after all, to burn in the quick flame, to serve by waiting, to drive a flying pen, were all secondary. Nor did any of them appear particularly sweet at the present moment. To lie still was easier.

CHAPTER VII

CAP AND BELLS: IN THIS MOLLY WOODRUFFE TANGLES A SKEIN AND ANNE HEREFORD PLAITS A THREAD

SARA began to play, at first automatically, and then, like a rocky pool that is filled when the high tide comes in, struck at last on the springs of passion hidden within. By this time the rooms were entirely silent, for most of the folks had gone off into that far country where each man meets his heart's desire, and those who could not go sat silent, for the look they saw on the travellers' faces.

The player could look from room to room across the bungalow at her audience who sat behind looped-back curtains at different distances from the grand piano. Through the open windows sounded the swaying of the trees and the hiss of the waves at the base of the cliffs on which the Woodruffes' house was built. Against the black dome of night the whole house blazed with lights and echoed with voices.

On the terrace outside paced Molly Woodruffe, the long, wing-like drapery of her sleeves stirring slightly as she moved. Sara noticed with a half smile the two men who walked on each side of the girl and when the three paused by the window she could plainly distinguish the long narrow face and aquiline nose of Stephen Anerley. There was something almost sinister in the close-set, projecting eyes that was contradicted by the upward curving corners of the lips where, although he was not yet five-and-twenty, the lines were already tightening around the mouth. His air was extremely self-confident, for he had never been beaten yet, nor did he even anticipate the possibility of catching a fall; a characteristic that, although engaging enough in youth, is not calculated to make a man popular in age. From the crispy blackness of his hair, his swarthy skin and masterful, yet shifty glance, one would have guessed him to be of southern extraction. He was, in fact, a Welshman, though not in the least of the same type of Celt as Archer Bellew, who walked on Molly's other side.

With the first bars of the Moonlight Sonata, Sara began to realise that she was awaking, for exactly the same sense was upon her as when a sleeper realises that over on the other side he has learnt something intuitively and beyond all possibility of doubt. As yet, she could not say exactly to what she had awakened, but that the knowledge was even now within her she felt absolutely certain. All these years she had seen things without understanding; now at last she was to see through them. She felt herself at the centre of a web of folly, mostly, it is true, of other people's weaving. By a leap of memory, her mind flew to Archer's old mother; she could see her now, a homely aproned figure like a fat tun, standing in the doorway of her shop as she sheltered her eyes with her hands, for she was somewhat of a cave-dweller in habit.

"Ginger's hot in the mouth with 'en," she had said of her son. "Every now and then there's something seems to shake 'en like a terrier with a rat, be it maid or be it hell-fire and brimstone. And 'tis a toss-up which 'twill be for the moment. Then a forgets, the fire dies down and he's sleepy. No need for herby tea to make 'en quiet then."

His method of work was like that, too; no regular three hours a day for him, but months of mooning, of absolute blankness, and then a fever till, with finger nails bitten to the quick and eyes deep-sunk with fatigue, he emerged, wrote *Finis*, and could scarcely be prevailed upon to correct his proofs. So it was in his relations with women; each one was an instrument on which he played a tune, played it once and then had done with the instrument, the testing of whose timbre had been the main interest of his effort. Ultimately each served but the purposes of his art by adding another portrait to his gallery of women.

Now his wife was, for the first time, to watch the actual process, which made all the difference in the world. Yet for the moment, under the influence of her music, she seemed to have risen above the web of entangling circumstance; only inward laughter seized her at the stupidity of it all. Here was Anne getting thin-faced and worried, here was Billy Knyvett half on the *Pendragon* and half off it, here was Molly of the winged drapery rushing towards a mockery of love. Soon probably Archer himself would creep back once again, with another shred of his manliness gone and with another volume with his name on its cover to add to the books she hated so. It was strange to think that this coil should have arisen from the fact that Vin Hereford regarded the child he had begotten as intended by Providence to act as the corner stone of his comfort.

Meanwhile on the terrace outside Molly was unhappy and dissatisfied, for Archer Bellew and Stephen Anerley appeared not ill friends and she had been secretly anticipating the joy of watching their rivalry. Yet, although she was unaware of the fact, they were approaching certain conversational rapids in which Bellew's contempt would assuredly appear. For Anerley was a journalist by profession and to Bellew this was the same as though one had said: "Now Barabbas was a robber." To him all journalists and teachers lived on the spoil of other men's brains and in a world wherein men are divided most rationally into voices and echoes, they were but echoes. Gradually, therefore, the older man began to emerge as the judge, the appraiser, of the younger one, carrying Molly with him into the seat of the scornful, for she instinctively ranged herself on the side of the stronger.

Bellew had just quoted with delight from an Arabian manuscript he had been reading: "Night was drawing apace and had already half-wrapped the earth with her dark, star-studded mantle."

"There," continued he, "you have it in a phrase, the solemn majesty of the on-coming of night, not described, but suggested. The English have lost the art of writing like that because they're afraid of anything more emotional than a tea-party. We shall soon have no feelings at all, we're so afraid of showing those we have."

"Under our quiet exterior we feel more deeply than mercurial nations," said Stephen, who always agreed fully with that body of opinion which forms the national standing-dish in the matter of brain stuff.

"I question that," said Bellew, "the Englishman's hide is as thick as a shell. He never feels anything but his own internal disorders, for he draws a solid rim round himself that cuts him off from the rest of the universe. 'Myself and the moving show,' that's his reading of the situation. He never feels himself one with the procession."

Bellew, as Molly began to recognise, was covertly describing Anerley, for that young man was as compactly built into his shell as a sea-urchin and as little aware as any mollusk of the vastness of the ocean in which he sported.

"No, Mr. Anerley," he continued, "we're a much over-rated nation."

Stephen instantly began to feel it his business to take up the cudgels on behalf of the national honour.

"We've sense enough, anyway," said he angrily, "to make ourselves bulk rather large in the eyes of the world. We do get things done, at least."

"Yes. Generally the wrong things."

"Nobody could answer a sweeping charge like that. It's a mere pose to despise everything English. We're getting so humble now that we're perfect worms. To hear an Englishman talk of himself makes one sick. If he's such a fool as he makes out, he simply hasn't the right to exist."

"Not when he's young," said Bellew slyly. "In youth he crows loudly enough."

Molly interposed.

"After all," she said "it isn't fair to complain because an Arab describes the sky better than an Englishman, for they don't see the sky in at all the same way."

"Exactly. They don't; that's what I complain of," said Bellew.

"It's more useful to see the earth than the sky."

"Not to a navigator," laughed Molly.

"Two men look through prison bars. One sees the mud and t'other the stars," hummed Bellew contemptuously.

Stephen was merely aware of the other's exhibition of temper and laughed; the talk was so entirely trivial and the man so irritable that he really enjoyed the sensation of rising temperature. But to Molly it was an occasion of considerable perturbation, for the thoughts in her that weighed the great and small out here on the terrace were embittered by a scorching recollection of Stephen's foolish exhibition of himself in the drawing-room half an hour before. There he had sung *Stille Nacht*, making the last word rhyme with "gnashed" and pronouncing the rest of the song in similar style. Molly's nerves had so often quivered at solecisms on her mother's part that her brain quickly sent the message of alarm to her cheeks. Stinging pity fought in her heart with anger that anyone belonging to herself should thus lay himself open to ridicule.

Stephen was a man who, whenever he talked science to a musician or law to an engineer, would be regarded as a Daniel come to judgment; it was only when his evil genius prompted him to venture on science with a scientist or law with a lawyer, that the eyes of these learned men were opened to the real character of his knowledge. Naturally endowed with a good conceit of himself, he had unfortunately always lived in a provincial town where he had never met any man of higher ability than himself, for it was not the mind, but the furniture of it that was in his case deficient. His profession, too, had encouraged him to assume the appearance of omniscience as he fluttered with the changing of the popular fancy from one watchword of progress to another. He had, in fact, never risen above the disadvantages of his early training and expected to be allowed to lay down the law on everything, from Greek accents to the principles of ventilation, to all and sundry. But in these days the privilege of talking nonsense is not even accorded to a pretty woman, still less to any man, however young and handsome.

"Don't you think," said Molly, trying to avert a storm, "that even Englishmen are ceasing to draw such thick rims round themselves? Every now and then one comes across a man who seems a part of the show. I always have that feeling with Mr. Knyvett, for instance."

She nodded towards the corner where Knyvett stood leaning against the window embrasure.

Such talk annoyed Anerley more than anything that had gone before, since he had a very distinct notion that women were not intended to meddle with ideas. His theory of the place of each human being in the social scheme was entirely rigid; everyone was a cog in a big machine born for one precise and definite duty. Some men were made to sweep the heavens, either as astronomers or aviators, others to make paths for the footsteps of the people, either as explorers or statesmen, but the functions of women were not so differentiated; racial service was all that could be expected of them. Yet he imagined himself in love with Molly Woodruffe, for there is nothing so inconsistent in all this world as the man of cast-iron opinions.

"A very characteristic attitude," laughed Bellew, following the direction of Molly's gaze, "for he's watching my wife as usual! But I know what you mean about him, of course. I remember his once saying that he never could imagine himself bothering about immortality, for he felt himself so much a part of it all that he never could conceive the possibility of dropping out of it. I wonder what I'd give out of my own gifts to feel like that," he said meditatively, stopping to light a cigarette.

Molly glanced at him adoringly, for she knew he disliked Knyvett cordially. She considered it most noble of him to speak so generously. Yet the next minute he was outdone by Stephen. The scene was, in Molly's view of it, rapidly becoming one in which each man outbid the other for her favour.

"You know," said Anerley, "I owe everything to Knyvett. My father is bailiff on his Welsh estate and it was he who insisted on the old man spending money to get me educated. Then he used his influence to push me on in my work; and finally he introduced me—down here," he concluded with a glance at Molly's shining head.

"A crowning mercy, of course," said Bellew. "He's a good chap, but rather apt to get upon stilts, though that's a habit he owes to his friendship with that cunning little hypocrite, Peter Westlake."

"Oh, that fellow!" said Molly. "Mother refused to invite him to-day. She said that in a small place like this one could not possibly drag in such people."

But Bellew pursued his own train of thought:

"Knyvett's not very English," he said, "for no Englishman ever stuck so long to an idealised woman as he has to my wife. Look," he cried. "She's now going to play again, that woman of mine. *Une vie manquée*, hers, if ever there was one."

Anerley glanced at him quickly, and then away, as one does at a sight that makes one's gorge rise, but Molly knew that Bellew was at all times a man whose whim it was to say to comparative strangers what most men don't say to their closest associates.

"It's the Hereford breed, of course, partly," he continued, "but by good rights she should have had a man's body to give full scope to her musical powers. As it is, she's a childless woman, with a song-bird in her heart that cannot sing and so fettered both ways."

His face worked and Molly drew him down beside her on a garden seat where Anerley could not see the expression on his face. In the half-darkness she laid her hand on Bellew's arm, all her being thrilling to the spirit within him.

"Mr. Knyvett," said she, covering the episode defiantly, "has the power of being impressed by everything he sees.

His nights at sea have made him different from us, less easy to hold, but more changeless."

She talked on, refusing to acknowledge the strangeness of Bellew's mood, but he would not be diverted, nor calmed. Stephen Anerley was entirely forgotten.

"Molly, Molly," whispered Bellew, "I believe you're the only one that knows me for something better than a brute. Little girl, don't let me hurt you. Never let me hurt you."

"No," said Molly, in trembling tones, nor thought of the absurdity of her confident assurance.

Then, as the first notes stole out into the garden, a gust of wind drove a shower of leaf-boles over their heads. Molly shivered and Anerley slipped away into the house to get her cloak. Bellew noticed nothing, but sat leaning forward to watch his wife as she played, while Molly clenched her hand in a passion of jealous pain. She drew a shade nearer, but he never moved. Both of them had forgotten Anerley, for always, when other folks put out to sea, he would be left behind picking up shells.

Presently he crunched across the gravel and dropped a cloak on Molly's shoulders. With a muttered "hush," she drew it round her, while Bellew leant still further forward, staring into the room with neck muscles taut and head projecting. His eyes were set and Molly knew that he had forgotten her; at the thought she stormed in protest and so learnt the power of this man's hold over her. Passages, sometimes cynical, sometimes high-flown, occurred to her from his books. She marvelled that he should know all that, yet hoped that from her he would learn something unlike anything he had learnt from the other women he had studied. It was the thought of these other women, somehow, that especially drew her to him. What they had enjoyed, why should not she? To be left out was the one unendurable fate.

She figured to herself her future and Bellew's as that of two winged creatures soaring in a dream; they would soon fall to earth, of course, but they would have had the good time once at least. It was not passion, nor love, that moved her; it was mere desire for that heightening of the colour of things which we call romance. To the weariness of the after days she would give no thought. The features of her small, sharp face grew rigid as she told her will that life should not be wasted. Then the wind that played on her lips and face awoke the thing that had been a-tiptoe in her all this time, for her father had sprung originally from an Italian stock. She leant forward, all the cold, calculating spirit of her mother driven from her.

But she called on deaf ears, since Bellew heeded her no more than does the eagle a beetle that winds his way up a grass blade.

On a summer day the clouds often form a film over the blue, till gradually there gathers over the sky a uniform canopy of grey that turns the moors to scarred expanses of desolation, as though out of the unseen a wizard had woven a garment. So comes the first inception of a new world to the teller of stories. A mere flutter of vapour at first, it gradually grows to cloud-shapes as mysteriously as the cumulus masses itself before the winds of heaven. In Bellew's brain, under the stimulus of the music, scenes flitted by half-seen and were quickly withdrawn by the master of the peep-show. When the last chords were struck he got up with a grunt and walked away, Molly's very existence forgotten.

It was as though the girl's nature had gathered itself for a spring and on the verge of the plunge had been driven back by a sudden blow. She sat breathless, trying to realise what had happened. The thing she had rejected so proudly was the thing she would have crawled for now. The laughter and voices that burst out in the room seemed a mockery of her pain. Then quiet followed as the people streamed away to supper; only the murmur of the sea swayed up and down, as the noise of water does by night.

She moved to its note, half rocking herself in the stress of her desire. Instinct, too, was alive in Anerley and he took a quick step forward, for some fraction of what was passing in the girl's mind he could follow. With a glance over her shoulder, she smiled wanly at him.

So he waited, stupidly treddling to and fro on his feet, for he understood that he was nothing but a substitute. All the training of his early years rose in revolt; let him go now at a woman's call and he would despise himself, for he had divined in her a sympathy with Bellew's contempt of him.

He would not go and so stood, watching her as she turned away through the thick natural plantation that sheltered the house from the sea winds. But as she went he heard her give a long, sighing breath. That he could not bear, and so followed.

In the stillness she waited for him, a white figure with both hands clasped beneath her chin. By now he had forgotten Archer Bellew's very existence, for with the long sleeves hanging from her shoulders, she seemed a winged thing hiding the secret of life. He hurried down between the trees, his nerves quivering into flame as the fallen twigs broke beneath his feet. Now he knew that she could not be owned; as well talk of owning the night-wind as try to own a woman; as well try to force her as attempt to plough the furrows of the sea. Her loveliness that had been created by the caresses of thousands of lovers, her body and soul that had been made the means whereby from age to age was accomplished the miracle of birth; these could only be given.

They stood in silence for a moment while the purring note of the night-jar trilled through the air. He could hear the soft shiver of the girl's breathing and almost cried with the pain of it. But she smiled and whispered: "Make me forget."

And he understood, but was not ashamed of his weakness in yielding, only proud of his manhood that could work this miracle for her.

The spring night was paling to dawn and soon the cheeping note of that first bird who wakes the woods would sound overhead. Then came the noise of wheels and voices; the guests were evidently departing.

"I shall be looked for," she whispered, disengaging herself, for by now she was ashamed, knowing herself to have given false coin for true. "You must forget me," she cried, "for I have done wrong. I don't know what possessed me. Indeed, I am not what you think."

"I think!" he exclaimed, holding her at arm's length. "I have followed every thought in your head to-night. Women often think that men don't understand what they refuse to know openly, as it were."

"And you don't mind?"

"Mind! I like it all the better. For I've won."

So the masterful instinct in him juggled him into peace. And for the time Molly believed in it too.

"Closer, closer," she whispered, her lips on his. "This is what I wanted."

"And that dangling, fantastic Jackanapes is forgotten?" he asked, as he brought her back to the house door. Nor did he wait for the reply, so sure was he of what it would be.

Within the house a nerve-storm had begun to brew between the mistress and her maids; for Mrs. Woodruffe had succumbed to the petty furies that tore her heart whenever a period of inactivity came into her life. After every great effort, such as the giving of this party, she would "run down" like an eight-day clock, with a great whirring of the pendulum. Her house was the field over which like a general she ranged her commanding eye, enjoying the prospect of battle, but proving ill to encounter when once it was over. Every part of the domestic apparatus, even to the dusters which matched the colour-scheme, was as point device as ingenuity could make it. For of the three stages of refinement which are, first, house; second, clothes; third, person, she had attained the first.

"And every single plate and glass that you break," shouted she, "will have to be paid for out of your wages."

Tired out as they were, the women were piling up dishes with a clatter that threatened chipped edges in every direction.

"Surely," asked Molly in haughty tones, "we might go to bed now, mother? This fuss and hurry is all quite unnecessary."

"That's not the way things are done in my house, I can tell you. And who's to know what'll be missing, if I don't go through the inventory at once?"

"Don't, mother," exclaimed Molly with a glance at the sullen women; "they can hear what you say."

"Hear! Of course they can. I meant them to. Well," she exclaimed, sinking into a chair and stretching her legs out in front of her, "how do you think it went off? Maitland," she shouted, while Molly clapped her hands angrily over her ears at the sound, "Maitland, I'll be out in ten minutes to go through the list with you. The champagne," she resumed, "lasted out all right, but the meringues were as hard as boot-leather. However, I meant to give cook a month's warning, for we shan't want anyone so extravagant now we haven't a party coming on. And the expenses I have been put to are really beyond all telling. First, there was your father's death at a time when we could ill afford it——"

Molly burst out into grim laughter. Though she had heard it so often, the joke of Mr. Woodruffe's ill-contrived departure always struck her afresh.

"And I saw you to-night," continued Mrs. Woodruffe, answering the laughter, the red spots burning on her cheeks, "you never cut the least bit of a dash with either of your two chaps, though you knew perfectly well that I was running up bills solely on your account. You've no womanly feeling, that's what's the matter with you. You'll be paid out for the way you flout your mother. See if you aren't. I'm sick of it all, I am, and I wish I was dead."

"You're tired out, mother, that's all. Do, for goodness' sake, go up to bed."

"And now you're treating me like a child," sobbed Mrs. Woodruffe. "But I suppose you haven't any news for me?" she wheedled, as though trying to coax a smile from the forbidding face of truth.

"No," said Molly curtly, "I haven't." She told herself that nothing in the world should induce her to cast pearls before swine and then was seized with inward wonder at the way the episode in the plantation, when compared with this sordid scene, had enshrined itself in her memory.

"And Stephen ?" shouted Mrs. Woodruffe. "What's become of him ? Why didn't he come back with you ?"

"I knew better than to bring him here," said Molly coldly. "I knew what you'd be like when all this was over. We really need not invite unnecessary spectators to see us quarrel. The maids are quite enough."

"Anything, even a lie," she said to herself as she went upstairs, "to escape from a life like this. Pity I can't put mother to the needless expense of a costly funeral."

Ultimately the servants gave notice in a body that night and left Mrs. Woodruffe raging over the plate-basket in search of two spoons and a fork that had been mislaid. But the next morning Molly was awakened by a maid who brought, as olive branch from her mistress, a pot of the best China tea with hopes that "Miss Molly had slept well."

Unfortunately Molly, being cursed with the gift of sardonic humour, saw in the tea a hereditary tendency, for Molly's grandfather had been an innkeeper whose habit it was to gauge happiness by the quality of meats and drinks consumed. The China tea so irritated her, therefore, that she instantly wrote a line to Stephen earnestly begging him not to suggest to her mother in any way that they were engaged. Nor was she aware that deep down in her mind there lurked a consciousness of having been embraced by the wrong man.

That night the mood of exaltation produced in Sara by her own playing had ended in a vicious desire to fling herself savagely on the pricks that walled her round. How far the fact that she found herself walking home from the Woodruffe's with Billy contributed to her recklessness it would be hard to estimate. He was, at any rate, the one man with whom she stood most readily "at ease."

"I've never heard you play better than you did to-night, Sara," said he.

"What's the good?" she exclaimed, shrugging her shoulders; "I never can do anything with it, tied as I am down here. I feel like a rat caught in a trap. And fools wonder why women don't do first-class work, when they haven't yet escaped from household bondage. And if they did, there'd be one thing for them always to be tied to."

"And what's that?"

Instead of answering directly, she turned away and looked up the river. She was down in the depths of her own bitterness and reckless of Billy.

"You know it would have made all the difference if I'd had a child. But he wouldn't let me. He said he came of too bad a stock for that. Once I thought he was going to change his mind. But he didn't. I've a drawer of little woolly toys at home that date from that time."

She flashed a glance at him, not being entirely without a secret desire to wake him from his stolidity. For his part he wondered to see how lightly women speak of sacred things. Nor did he actually realise that here the sacredness was so steeped in gall that it had lost its original savour.

"I believe I've hated him ever since," she continued. "You wonder to hear me talk like this, but I've no one else, you know. I don't want to cast more of a shadow over Anne than I can help. You see a woman can bear being childless if she can fill her life with something else. I might have had my music, if there had not been my father."

"Then you think a childless marriage can be none in reality?"

"Oh, no, I would not say that. The best marriage I ever knew was that of two old country people who worked together always, planted their garden, cared for their bees and chickens—together. It was childless, 'tis true, but she'd drop in the potatoes when he'd hoed the ground ready. He called her the ganger. That made all the difference, you see. I always think of those potatoes, when I see married people drifting apart.

With people in our position everything is wrong when either husband or wife goes on the longest journey alone. Cryptic, isn't it ?" she asked with a laugh, for she was gradually talking herself into placidity.

"Tell me what you mean ?"

"Archer's longest journey away from himself is in the people he creates; mine is when I make music. We're both of us highest when we are far away in our work. If we could travel together everything would have been different. But when he wanders away with his thought people, he puts me outside. He doesn't suppose I should care. I never went with him, you see. I never got to know his characters gradually as he gets to know them. I can read the books when they're written, of course. That's all. I never know anything of the conception, of the pain of birth. We never think together, never have."

"Could it ever be possible ?"

She looked at him and he understood, for everything was the sweeter to them both when they shared it. Only a few minutes together were needed to make the world seem entirely homely to them both. From such kinship followed exhilaration.

"And that," asked he, "would take the place—of what you spoke of before ?"

She hesitated, but the very condition of their comradeship was truth.

"Not quite," she said slowly, "for you know I've got my feet very firmly fixed on the common earth. And thought, the mimic world that Archer lives in, is like something horrible that feeds on the reality of things. It is like the ivy that sucks the vital juices from the tree. I hate it. Everything is gauged now as it yields copy. That explains many things which people think I ought to worry over."

Did she really care or not ? With all Knyvett's knowledge of her, he could not answer that.

"You see the new danger ?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, "I'm sorry for the girl. But Anne will help, I think, to prevent much mischief. She has a great genius for friendship. Oh," she cried, seeing his face, "I went through that and came out on the other side long ago. No girl will ever hold him. Only a woman could do that, and Molly, poor child, for all her politics, would be only a gossamer web tying up a bull. Yet the tragedy is that only girls appear to attract him nowadays."

He forced himself to remember how she had suffered, lest a feeling of repulsion at her plain speaking should gain on him. But he felt that for his own satisfaction, one thing must be put right.

"There is only one person who can really tackle this job," said he, curtly. "Is there any possible contingency that would make you face the world's disapproval?"

"Yes, one," said she, as bluntly as he.

He did not ask what it was, for his courage failed him there. Instead he began to talk of Mrs. Bodinar and her maternal care for that graceless son of a gun, Simon the treasure-seeker.

"'Wambling home, all drinky-like,'" laughed Sara, glad of a change to something less emotional than their previous conversation.

"Sara," asked Mr. Knyvett, feeling the quick spur of a curiosity that drives us to learn a secret we fear to know, "are you like Mrs. Bodinar, would you feel you must help Bellew if he wanted it?"

"Yes, if I felt I were dragging him down, I'd even rush to sea and risk the trouble to my 'innerds.'"

"Or what is more likely to be needed—release him?"

"Yes."

"Facing everything—for him?" He could not keep the note of pain away. Hearing it, she voiced a bitterness in herself that neither of them had suspected.

"After all," she said, "he took me and you did not. No, no, Billy, I didn't mean that!"

"But it's so true that it's a truism," he answered with a wry smile at her.

Her thoughts had flown to the weeks she had spent in Florence with Bellew after their marriage; it was little more now to her than the memory of a fine thing spoiled.

For everything was theirs that ought to have been, save one. They were alone together, man and woman, spending the first hours of intimacy amid the beauty of early Italian spring. They were, moreover, finely gifted with power to appreciate what the south could offer. It was not that which had failed.

During the first days she had experienced for the only time in her life that blissful aloofness from the tiny sordid trifles that in the everyday flow of things made existence a succession of petty anxieties. The sensation was doubly grateful to her on whom the well-being of her father had depended for so long. Between herself and discomfort there was now a wall that made a night spent in an insect-ridden hut among the mountains merely an amusing experience. She felt, in short, as free of care as the lilies of the field.

Then she found her mistake; there was nothing in Bellew of the rocklike stolidity which even the average man of blunt nerves can supply for his wife's comfort. There was nothing in him for her to fall back upon. It was she who would have to think and plan for him.

It was in a mountain village that she made the discovery which taught her that he meant her to go hungry of her deepest need. The knowledge came in somewhat cruel fashion, too, for seeing a woman going about the village, listless, squalid, with signs of a blow on her face, she made enquiries and learnt that the husband had struck the poor creature for her childless condition.

With the murmur of the mountain stream in her ears, she told Archer what she had heard and asked him a question. He sat with a rigid face and then told her quietly that she, too, must be childless. He told her why and she had argued the point, she remembered, like a scientist, quoting Brieux and instancing many cases of incalculable freaks of heredity. He had jested, she remembered, calling her a sweet-lipped Ibsen, a biologist more acute than Weissmann.

It was the jest that had broken something in her, although she was silent at the time. Slowly the days grew heavier, till at last she repulsed him with a shudder.

He spent that night on the hills and returned in the morning with a nocturne in his head, but the chain had snapped at its thinnest link. No one but herself knew the bitterness of the succeeding months; she only felt that the spirits of the unborn were clamouring to her for life.

Billy's thoughts had gone on an even more bitter pilgrimage than hers—to his own awakening and the purchase of the *Pendragon*.

"Why are things so damnable?" he burst out, standing with shoulders hunched up as though it were raining.

"Just because they trap us before we realise the meaning of them," said she. "We do things at twenty, not guessing how they look at thirty."

"Anyway," said he abruptly, "I want you to be quite sure of one thing. That whenever—if ever—you should be driven to cut the painter, whenever the situation between you and Archer grows really intolerable——"

"Yes?"

"I shall be ready. Nor could anything be too hard for me to do."

"I think I had counted on that. But, Billy, it's all so lonely."

She put a hand on his arm and he covered it with one of his. Like men who know the strength of their own passions, he kept a tight rein on himself. Only the flash that brings green lights into the eyes showed inner fires.

"And, after all," she said, answering that, "we still have the best, the understanding, the sympathy."

"You don't really believe that, Sara. Don't cover things up," he cried harshly. The next moment he was striding down the road without so much as a backward glance.

"He'll sail in a few days after this," she said with a tender smile, remembering his quick exits after a crisis. She hummed Bodinar's song:

> "Down, down, down, at the bottom of the sea,
> Where the dead men crawl upon hand and knee."

"Thank God," said she piously, "for the open air, for sun and wind and men's blustering heartiness. For these things keep the world sweet."

Then, falling on the matter of blustering heartiness she suddenly remembered that she had seen nothing of her sister all the evening.

"No, I didn't intend to go," said Anne, as she sat up in bed with hands clasped round her knees; "I never could put up with that woman and if Peter's too low down for her, so am I. That's why I went over and proposed to him to-night. Yes, I've been with him all the evening, administering shocks. But really I've been so worked up with the atmosphere in this house, the tender moaning over what can't be helped, that I thought I'd fix up one thing right away. Peter and I won't make another kettle of spoilt fish."

In most things Anne was like a steam-engine, but this took away even Sara's breath. She sat down at the end of the bed while Anne faced her with cheeks a-flame.

"Are you by any chance at all feverish?" asked Sara.

"Not in the least. But I should have a quotidian-tertian ague in a couple of shakes if I didn't contrive to make something happen in this malarial swamp. Well, the *Pendragon* sails a-buccaneering in a few days. Billy'll be glad to go, I should opine. But as I myself can't let out by creeping along close-reefed in a Cape Horn gale, I've taken up with Peter instead. But I shan't get spliced till I've got my M.D., for like all pious people he's as lazy as they make 'em. Oh, of course he plods along doing routine work, but intellectually he's comatose. I shall be unto him like a perpetually exploding squib fastened to his tail."

"Are you really serious, Anne?"

"Certainly. Never more so," answered she, covering herself with the bedclothes till only one eye was visible. "Dad was beginning to talk of reading Æsthetics with me, you see. Now there couldn't be a finer corrective to Æsthetics than Peter. Oh, dear," she cried, fancying some reproach in Sara's look, "I suppose I'm hideously selfish. But there really is no sense in both of us being sacrificed on the family altar. Now is there?"

Sara assured her confidently that there was none, but Anne, in direct defiance of her principles, kept awake half the night, wondering whether her remaining unsettled in life could make any possible difference to Sara. In the morning she wrote to Peter telling him not to make the mistake of imagining they were engaged.

But since her courage failed at the posting point and the letter was never sent, Peter Westlake was left in tranquil possession of the field.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAY OF A MAN IN TWO MODES: IN THIS STEPHEN ANERLEY USES A CUDGEL, AND ARCHER BELLEW A RAPIER

To Stephen Anerley there was but one conceivable way of wise living and that was to push on, never to look back, never to turn aside. The precise nature of the goal was not clearly defined, though in general it assumed the form of an income increasing by arithmetical if not by geometrical progression, accompanied by a warm sense of general beneficence. To do him justice, it must be confessed that the latter item was quite as essential to his happiness as the former. Thus he always desired to forward any "reforms" that were much in the air at the moment and an article embodying certain scientific facts on the prevention of consumption, for instance, when written by himself, would suffuse through his frame a pleasant glow that was far more due to the notion of another item to his credit account in the book of life than to the cheque the article earned him. In short, he walked by the gleam he saw in the far distance, confidently believing it to issue from the windows of the celestial mansions; at the worst it may be said that though the light by which he walked might be due to the celestial bonfire, yet he certainly enjoyed the primroses on the path.

It was Molly's capacity for pushing her way, combined with her emotional dependence, that had first attracted him. He had no intention, of course, of allowing his wife to provide for herself, but he would have felt her to be too feeble in calibre to make a satisfactory mother for his children, had she not been capable of earning an income—of course a smaller one than his own, since its size would always serve, even in moments of self-exaltation, to remind her that the position of wage-earning woman is secondary to that of man. Yet, since he was an honest man, he acknowledged to himself that Molly's waywardness was not without its attraction for him. Even this, he persuaded himself, was entirely logical, for did not waywardness mean vitality, and vitality, health and power? All eminently desirable in a wife and mother. Besides, his virility was not unflattered by the sense that it was in him to tame a dangerous domestic animal. But the culminating point of his delight came in the fact that he, the great Stephen, should have netted this animal in the face of formidable rivals.

Altogether he was in a superbly happy frame of mind next morning as he discoursed of Molly to Mrs. Woodruffe; it was characteristic of the man that Molly's note asking for secrecy had been quietly dropped into the waste-paper basket of his mind.

Far otherwise was it with Mrs. Woodruffe who, with the intense dislike of mental exertion that often goes with fussy bodily activity, was now with pain and effort engaged in forcing herself to realise the exact position of affairs. Rather late in the day for this it certainly was, but Molly's mother was the sort of woman who, after getting up at dawn to catch a train, will find herself not exactly sure whether it is marked A.M. or P.M. And now that she had nearly caught this particular train for her daughter she was beginning to feel that it was out of all question, the wrong one.

As in all natures which are slow in acquiring impressions, those few ideas that had been driven home in Mrs. Woodruffe were very deep-rooted. They dated, of course, from the days of her youth, for such women acquire no fresh notions after twenty, and were accordingly endowed with the tenacity of the *idée fixe*. Everything in her system of thought was reduced to two conceptions; men were made to earn money, but the woman who required to work for her living was not only a failure, but a degraded failure. Her affection for her daughter was not high-toned, of course, but it was genuine as far as it went and it would have broken her heart to think that her only child had been driven to the last desperate resource of the derelicts of femininity, that hateful work, the hall-mark of failure. She had been forced by Molly's will to acquiesce in the training that had fitted her for a secretaryship, she had even welcomed the several situations as so many matrimonial chances for the girl. But that such a state of things should last was inconceivable, since every woman of ordinary good looks had one unfailing weapon against defeat, the power of arousing desire. If she was fool enough not to use it, then let her fall into the hell of womanhood. Let her toil for her living and be stamped as a pariah.

Entirely without capacity for passion herself, she believed her daughter to be quite well able to take care of herself, able in fact to suggest intrigue for the purpose of further allurement. Hence the idea that Molly's flirtation with Bellew was anything more than the setting of a man-trap never occurred to her for a second. All that side of things was just man's weakness, the weakness by which woman lived.

For a short period during her early married life she had herself been obliged to make her hands sodden by taking in the washing of fine linen; the memory of that brief period of poverty and work seemed a greater stain on her past than an illicit love affair. For she had in extreme form the docility that accepts men's estimate of women's position, combined with the unswerving relentless logic that forces that estimate to its complete fulfilment. For in Mrs. Woodruffe's idea if a woman ought to live by sex, for her to live by anything else is manifest failure.

But there are higher and lower prices to be paid; she was minded to get a high price for her daughter and was at last awaking to the fact that Anerley's price was not as high as it ought to be, especially when there were other potential bidders.

The daughter of an innkeeper in a naval port, she had picked life to its bare bones. Her earliest memories were of the rushing mornings when the incessant rattle of the till resulted from a ship's being paid off, the furtive evenings when men and women who had reached the lowest stage of the drink craze had to be hustled out of the way of inspectors. Her father was a shrewd, hard man, pitiless and hungry, who kept his end well up. The memory of it all and of its maxims of wisdom, was bitten deep, even to the constant child-bearing illnesses of her mother who was a fool, for she should, in her department of life, have cheated a bit. She would not then have died, prematurely worn out. Still, an honest woman who did her duty to the man who supported her.

From it all one ruling idea emerged, the notion that to be "a master man," one free of tied houses, was the only really superior position. For everything in the new station of life to which marriage had removed her was now translated by her into the terms which she had learnt in her childhood. Thus to her, the true "master man" was an employer, not an employé, and when she found that Anerley's family was in a position of dependence on Mr. Knyvett, she felt that marriage with him would be humiliating for Molly. Worse than all, when Stephen, with the straightforward honesty that was largely due to his own self-confidence, went on to speak of the inherent riskiness of all journalism, she instantly regarded him as a man employed in casual labour. Being inherently incapable, however, of letting go a single string to her bow, she began to temporise.

"Dear Mr. Anerley," said she, "we must not force the child's feelings. I have always thought that a young girl's affection is a sort of delicate bloom which a rough touch may brush off."

Stephen, being unable to compare speech and thought in Mrs. Woodruffe, entirely acquiesced in the suitability of her sentiments, though of course he put no more faith in them than she did herself. They were only *comme-il-faut*, like the *d'oyleys*, the drawn-thread tea-cloths, the single flowers in "specimen glasses" without which Mrs. Woodruffe found it impossible to exist. She was now a housekeeper of the type who lays traps to prove whether the housemaid turns the mattresses every day, having travelled many a mile since the days when Mr. Woodruffe had been forced to marry the innkeeper's daughter who heartily despised him for allowing himself to be entrapped.

"But," said Stephen with the air of one taking off his shoes on holy ground, "I have every reason to believe that her affection is mine."

He smiled inwardly at his elegant euphemism for her "closer, closer, make me forget." Then he felt ashamed of his smile, for Molly, apart from her mother, was entirely dear to him.

"The child would not willingly mislead you I am sure, but she is impulsive. I was just the same at her age. So I know; I made my mistakes, too," she sighed with her head on one side, her little eyes shining with the enjoyment of playing a fish. She already saw herself arranging alliances for Molly's children. But she had a shrewd suspicion that they would not also be Stephen's.

Then the fish took the bait between his teeth and bolted up stream.

"Mrs. Woodruffe, I know that Molly cares for me. I learnt that last night without any possibility of doubt. What do you want me to do?"

"Let her have six months more of freedom," said Mrs. Woodruffe, giving him his head; "that will allow the child time to make sure. She has heard of a new post and will soon leave here."

It was untrue, but threw an illusive air of comfort over the arrangement for Stephen's benefit.

He walked to the window and looked out. There the sickly scent of a pink hawthorn got inextricably mixed with the distaste for Molly's mother that was rising in him. Meanwhile Mrs. Woodruffe patted her fringe-net and congratulated herself on her diplomacy. But Stephen was beginning to understand.

He came back, sat down heavily in a low bamboo chair, crossed one leg over the other and began examining the lacing of his boot. Then he looked up:

"Mrs. Woodruffe," said he, "you don't exactly welcome me as a son-in-law. That I see plainly. We've got to have this fair and square. I'm a business man and I begin to think you are a business woman. Now either you mean that your daughter is to go on as she is doing at present, or else you've a more eligible match for her. One or the other of those two alternatives it must be. I want to know which."

"Dear me, Mr. Anerley," said Mrs. Woodruffe, trying to laugh, "you are forgetting that the poor child has no father, only a poor weak woman who isn't used—really she isn't—to such plain speaking. For I am only a woman, you know."

She showed the surprise she might have felt had he called her a griffin. But Stephen was getting angry.

"And what your being a woman has to do with it, I don't know," he said. "I guess you haven't fought your way up to where you now are without a little horse sense. Anyway, here it is. She'll earn a miserable pittance for herself compared to what I can give her. For, thank God, we still have the power to get for our women the ease and comfort they can't get for themselves, try how they will. That's the sheet anchor in all this sea of turmoil round us. And when that goes there'll come the end of all things. But it won't be in my time, nor in yours. Now, even now, women like comfort, and we can give it to 'em. Everything else is all bunkum."

Even while he spoke he was surprised to compare himself with the Stephen of last night; just a little ashamed perhaps, too, but the truth was that deep answered to deep in these two natures; and both began to feel the fact. Mrs. Woodruffe was silent, for his bolt had gone home. His success gave him courage for a second shot.

"And you'd better let me take her away," he said, "though, by Heaven, I believe she loves me, yet there's another man hanging about who has got what every man who is a man himself can recognise—a sort of gipsy power of making the silly things hop down to him. Every woman seems to get him on the brain," he grumbled.

Mrs. Woodruffe's heart beat high at this unsolicited testimonial to Molly's attractiveness; yet to her fancy there was a contemptuous tone about his words. This, however, she ascribed to the mere jealousy of a rival.

"Oh, that's nothing," she purred.

"Nothing, is it?" he cried. "You take it very easily that a married man should dangle about after your daughter. Some mothers——"

"Gracious! that wasn't what I meant at all. I can trust Molly entirely."

"Then what did you mean?" he asked. "For something you did mean, I'll go bail. Oh, oh, I see," he roared, "there's another lady-killer about, is there? They seem to swarm down here like bees. But you're out, Madam, entirely out. He's only got eyes for one woman in all the world."

"Oh, but that's off," she exclaimed quickly, and then paused, dismayed at the admission she had made.

"So that," he said quietly, "is the meaning of the six months you want. Six months in which to catch a bigger fish. The patriarch of the pond, as you may call it, in fact, since I owe everything I have to him. Well, you shall have your six months. I wouldn't have Molly come to me with any hankerings after anybody else for anything you could pay me. I'll not have her at all, or else I'll have her freely. I'd rather she didn't come quite of the family she does, but——"

"That's enough," snapped Mrs. Woodruffe, "since you force me to plain speaking by your insults, let me tell you that it is to your family no less than to your poor prospects that I object. My daughter might look much higher than to a marriage with a mere bailiff's son, a struggling provincial journalist——"

Her scorn of the woman who works was only equalled by her contempt of the man who follows such a lazy trade as sitting in a chair letting his pen run on. She would have applied this criterion equally to Shakespeare as to Stephen.

"Say penny-a-liner, while you are about it," answered Stephen, his eyes flashing. "Old Nietsche says we spit bile and call it newspapers. Now we've both lost our temper, which is a damned silly thing to do, but natural under the circumstances. I want you to know, anyhow, that there's no inferiority on my side. Potted meats aren't Buckingham Palace, you know, and my father has more than a tincture of humane letters, while I——"

He swelled, an Alexander of the world of the intellect.

"And Molly loves me, God bless her," he said, his harshness melting. To his thought, how like a jewel she shone in the head of this toad of a mother.

"Now," he continued, "we've had a good old mother-in-law and son-in-law wrangle and we've begun well. That's all as it should be. So shake hands, Molly's mother, for, by heaven, that covers a multitude of sins—— You won't? Well, never mind. Better luck for me next time."

And so he flung himself out of the room with a laugh. His self-esteem was even flattered by her angry demeanour, for a man's good conceit of himself is a plant capable of sucking sustenance out of the arid surface of a prison wall.

Mrs. Woodruffe breathed a sigh of relief when he had gone. She was not as much overcome by his violence as he imagined, for she flourished on bluster and only grew timorous when people finessed. Now that she knew, indeed, that Stephen was a man whose moods she could follow, she even derived a pleasing sense of power from the fact. Nor did she bear malice for his plain speaking, since in his place she would have acted in precisely the same way.

As to the substance of his talk, since she possessed one of the great secrets of happiness—a capacity for ignoring the warnings of evil that did not accord with her own prepossessions—she simply snatched at his prognostications as so many pegs on which to hang her calculations for the future. From the interview with Anerley she derived, therefore, the idea that, as regards her daughter, he might always be reckoned on as something to fall back upon in the event of failure in other directions. In her view he was a sort of cut-and-come-again dish, for evidently his attachment was likely to be a lasting one. From this fact she even derived the kind of vicarious enjoyment that comes from the contemplation of a persistent wooer.

Should he again ever succeed in his courtship, Molly would assuredly sink into no squalor, for Stephen would always demand and obtain that keeping up of appearances which was Mrs. Woodruffe's highest ideal of well-being. His drawing-room would always be well upholstered, his sideboard silver of the brightest polish, his sons would enter the professions and his daughters be in a position to demand satisfactory settlements. Though she regarded him with scorn as a man who got his living by a pretence of work, she yet respected his cunning since he was able, by the smallest possible expenditure of effort, to carry out all his purposes. His directness appealed to her as business-like, his roughness she mistook for power, and his air of omniscience she took for wisdom. In a word, he appeared to be of good grain because she found him highly polished. There would be no terrifying splendour of brilliancy about this match, no marble halls, but one could comfortably take one's ease in it.

To the warning with respect to Bellew, she was constitutionally incapable of attending. She had a considerable admiration for the full-fleshed, red-lipped, mustachioed type of manhood, but, since Bellew was as far as possible removed from this, he appeared to her to be negligible. That the virile force of muscle and blood-flow may by mental characteristics be transformed into an attraction a thousand times more powerful, because a hundred times more subtle, she had not the remotest conception.

Molly, in effect, belonged to another class than that of her mother; her education, while it made her able to earn a living, had also subtilised instincts that Mrs. Woodruffe only knew in crudest form. The mere position that Bellew held in the world of letters, the reputation he enjoyed as one whose whole gamut of joys and pains was world-wide, constituted a call in Molly's eyes to zests more poignant than any the ordinary life can give. The little handful of people who sit perpetually drinking at the tap of the publishing world considered that Bellew was not only giving them ever deeper and deeper conceptions of human character, but was actually helping to evolve a new type.

To Mrs. Woodruffe all this was unknown; the differing shades of literary values were to her as incomprehensible as would be the difference between red and pink to the colour-blind. Nor did she imagine for a moment that, to Molly, the happiness of being regarded with favour by Bellew was in no way comparable to the bliss it would give her could she but be recognised as the original from whom a picture of girlhood had been painted. Where Mrs. Woodruffe had fixed her ideas on an establishment, Molly was longing neither for an intrigue nor for a love affair, but for an episode that should exalt her for a space to that superworld where the women of fiction are created. As yet the girl was not so much in love with Bellew, or even with love itself, as longing to play her part in that literary pantheon where to have reached the greatness of a collected edition is to be recognised as a torch-bearer, but to have been loved by the author thus enskied is to have been singed by the flame of the altar itself. Nor did she recognise as yet, that it is a world of mock-heroics where shadows pursue yet more shadowy visions and where all things end in the dream of a dream.

Mrs. Woodruffe was far wiser; she knew that Molly and Stephen would soon weld their ambitions into one. Molly's dresses, her parties, even the style of her table decorations and the quality of her brains would all be used to hoist Stephen up the rungs of provincial greatness. She could see him town councillor, sheriff, mayor; she felt, too, the comfortable assurance that Molly would bear the insignia of office with the air of an empress.

Compared with the cold dignities of a grande dame's existence, how warm and fire-lit was this future! Yet the far height beckoned to Mrs. Woodruffe as it does to all striving souls and she could not entirely relinquish the scheme of a Knyvett alliance. Nor did her calculations belie her intelligence as much as may appear, for the great interplay of the world between intellect and instinct had been reduced by her to two factors only—man's instinct for woman, quickly sated, yet ever burning, and woman's intellect as definitely taking advantage of this instinct to win for herself wealth, position, honour—all that men win by effort and brain. To these twin powers she could put no limit.

Far back, too, in the centuries Mrs. Woodruffe's family had risen from a farm-labourer's cottage by precisely the quality she was exhibiting now, an entire inability to recognise the impossible or to calculate the opposing forces.

Meanwhile Molly struggled as one who is torn between conflicting forces, for she was amazed, not only at the duplicity of her own actions, but at the doubleness of her own nature. For even in the soreness of being rejected by Bellew she had found sweetness in yielding to Stephen. Yet all the time she told herself that she hated him, that he was a mere usurper.

On the morning after the party she had gone up to her mirror, but fully as she had intended to tell him the plain, bare truth, she was deterred by the spectacle she saw in the glass. Wan-faced, big-eyed, no power on earth could induce her to risk letting her lover see her like this.

And by the evening the impulse itself had died down in her, for in woman it is not wine that discloseth the truth, but the sour temper of the dawn. Aurora, not Bacchus, is the truth-bringer.

It was late in the evening of the next day when Stephen and Molly walked towards the river mouth. Between the branches of the trees, across the glitter of the river, they watched the shadow creeping higher up the opposite bank where the tracery of the bare pine trunks wrote strange hieroglyphics on the sunbaked redness of the cliffs. From a trawler in the estuary between the two castles at the mouth came the creaking of gear and the hoarse shouts of the men. The shipwrights' hammers in the building yards were silent now; the anchored vessels swayed at their moorings, for the tide was going out.

It was queer, thought Molly, to see all around her such complete absorption in shipping, coal-lifting, freight-carrying, in all the banal details of the work of the world, in fact. Hardly half-a-dozen people in the town could form any conception of the world of thought wherein she lived. Even in the midst of her own perplexities she enjoyed the elation of imagining herself to be part of the rare and strange, of feeling herself signed with the seal of a very rarefied spiritual world.

Suddenly her mind leapt very much to earth; she wondered, as women will, what Stephen would do if he saw her insulted. Would he look on, emasculate as men are now from too many centuries of "law and order"? She asked him the question point-blank.

"Knock him down if he wasn't the better man," answered Stephen promptly; "get knocked down myself if he was."

Even to one of her spiritual vision this rang true.

"You may kiss me," she cooed.

Stephen saw the connection between her remark and his; he laughed delightedly and further showed his strength by lifting her high up on an ivy-grown rock. Nor did Molly feel that the clip of his muscles was anything but a joy to her, for she was not by any means as far removed as she imagined from the everyday world where men and women will to live.

"We'll shake down together well enough, Moll, old girl," said he, tucking her hand comfortably under his arm, "only you must not unsettle yourself with too many fancies. Why not draw up a solid course of good reading? I doubt now whether you're well up in people like Macaulay, or Mill or——"

"Hallam and Grote," cried she. "Oh, you dear boy, and Mill wrote 'The Subjection of Women!' And how many of the hundred best books have you read?"

"You have me there," laughed he, "but really now, I do think a woman with a serious future before her ought to read up well. For her place is most important, you know——"

"Wife and mother and all that?" she enquired demurely.

"Well, yes," confessed he, shocked at hearing her mention it. For in provincial circles bed-rock realities, even those of money, are handled secretively.

"Ought to do what?" enquired Molly, enjoying herself hugely.

"Frame her mind on solid foundations."

"For her duties?" she asked.

Then a Rabelaisian sprite possessed her, for Stephen, brutal-tongued with men and mothers-in-law, walked velvet-shod where women were concerned.

"The other day," said she, "a father remarked to his little girl by way of teaching her natural history: 'Now the birds are going about all very busy propagating their kind.' And she answered: 'One doesn't see you, daddy, go about propagating your kind.' Laugh, Stephen, it's funny," she said, regarding his o'erclouded face.

"Not on your lips, my dear," answered he. "There is nothing less charming in a woman than a misplaced sense of humour."

"From which I suffer?"

"From which you do undoubtedly occasionally suffer."

"But what if a woman doesn't *want* to be charming?" she asked, pursuing her enquiries still further.

"I am unable to conceive of such a monster," said he sententiously.

So, too, was she, as a matter of fact, though she had met plenty of women who verbally disdained the ambition. But his tone rankled none the less, as her mind darted to a sense of their relative positions; she at home in the London world, clutching at the coat-tails of various M.P.'s; he a provincial, who chronicled from afar the doings of those to whose groans of vexation she listened in private life.

Nor was the falseness of the position to be overcome by the fact that he had a sweet style in kissing, for when the first warmth of love-making was over she realised that she would be perpetually breaking her teeth on the hard rock of incompatibility. Under this stimulus her craving for honesty again awoke; he ought to be told that he was a mere interloper. He certainly would be told if he went on much longer in this tutorial style.

Blindly he rushed on, being totally unaware of the offence he was giving.

"I wish you'd let me draw up a list of books," he said. "I would take care to make it sufficiently varied to be interesting, to include some lighter stuff. People talk constantly of physical training, but they exercise no discretion whatever in the books they read. And only too many of the works of the day, if not actually poisonous, are at any rate full of new notions. But the old tried and tested ideas ought to be good enough for anyone. Women are especially likely to be carried away by any new folly. Of course, we must move with the times, like opening windows for consumption, instead of shutting them, but men must *prove* everything first."

"Before handing it on to the women?" asked Molly suavely. "But after all," she said, changing her tone, "the new thoughts are what really matter to the people of to-day, for they are their own thoughts. We must always be changing, be pressing on."

"We?"

"Yes, we, men and women. Why should we bury ourselves in what other people thought long ago? They're dead. Soon we shall be. They had their time to think and it's only fair that we should have ours. We, who were born in the end of the 19th century, don't think as they did in the 18th. Why should we? It isn't reasonable to expect us to."

"Dangerous doctrine," said he.

"Why?"

"Well, none of these opinions are tested. They may cut you."

Molly shrugged her shoulders angrily. "Of course not; it's our business to test them. And if one's cut, well, there's all the more fun in that."

They were poles apart, though only Molly could have put her finger on the exact difference between them. She had, in fact, the instinct of the path-finder; it was this instinct which made her cling so closely to those who, as she fancied, soared above her. Stephen belonged as instinctively to those who take what is found for them.

"Why," said she eagerly, "don't you see how splendid it is to feel yourself part of a big host and sometimes actually to come with them to a jumping-off place where the race actually begins a new advance?"

"These things are better left to men, Molly. Woman belongs to the dear old unchanged instinctive things, to love and home."

"The blood-stained Moloch of the English people," cried Molly in Cassandra-like tones.

"What?" exclaimed he, startled.

"The British home. Woman's health, woman's brains, woman's powers have been sacrificed to it. Four walls of a house, says the man; there you are, don't you ask any more, for that's your kingdom. There's power, adventure, enterprise outside, but you mayn't so much as touch it all."

"Who taught you that nonsense?"

"Taught me!" exclaimed she. "Why, if everyone were like you, man would be arboreal still. It was people who thought everything dangerous that I expect at first refused to live in caves. And when the women told you to walk upright, I've no doubt you and your sort called it a most improper innovation. And I guess you *didn't* walk upright, till the women twisted your tails and made you. Oh, my dear Stephen, what a number of whippings all you men will have to bear to make you take the fences women mean to make you jump."

"My dear," said he shrewdly, "don't forget that there's one thing the women will have to accept for themselves if they get the new conditions. And a lot of those who call loudest now won't like it at all."

"And what's that?"

"The day's work. Look at all your leisured women who'll have to put in their eight, nine, ten hours of routine work. They won't like it, will want to turn back."

"Perhaps so. But they'll have to march with the rest."

"Just so. That's what we all have to do—to march with the rest, you know. So many things about you surprise me, Molly. I always wonder why you admire Hardy, for instance, for he has said worse things of your sex than any man, living or dead. Why is it ?"

"Because," said Molly, after a moment's reflection, "he always puts us where we like to be—in the centre of the stage."

"But he shows you in such a pet about nothing but love and marriage. Just what one would expect you to hate."

"Not at all! He shows the truth, that we are not half so anxious about money and getting on as about what we care for most."

"And what is that ?"

"Just to feel alive all over and thrilling. And if a lover can give us that sensation quicker than anything else, then it's a lover we want of course. That's only common sense."

Stephen groaned, for Molly made him feel as though he were at the centre of a tornado; his nerves were on edge, his skin tingled. He had always believed that women were passive, that only the bad ones were afire. He began to ask himself the question she had previously asked herself; how were they to bear their difference in make, in ideal ?

It was she who spoke first.

"Stephen," she said, driven more by the desire for mental clearness than by that moral craving for honesty which she had tried to awake in herself, "I did not realise what I was doing last night. I did not, indeed. I was overstrained, excited. I want you to forget it, to let things be as they were before."

"You mean that it was all a lie, when you let me hold you ?"

"No, no, not all a lie. But you said you understood and I thought it couldn't be wrong if you really did."

He turned away with an impatient exclamation to lean over the fence that guarded the edge of the cliff. The line of red rocks sheeny with the glow of sunset, unconsciously impressed themselves on his mind as, bird encircled, tree-clad, they faded away into the dimness.

"Yes, I understood," he said with a man's hatred of explicit speech, "but the point won't bear being hammered at. You must have cared, for your heart beat under my hand. Molly, dearest, it's a bad dream. And I have to go away and leave you," he added, childishly inconsequent.

He had by now entirely forgotten his sense of mental incompatibility; another compatibility was by far the more important thing at the present moment. She, too, was nearer loving him, now that she saw him suffering, than she ever had been before.

If she married him, he should be transformed by her powers; she would teach him to woo other goddesses than those of money and position. Besides, the other man was forbidden fruit, and worst of all, indifferent. There were indeed no arguments stronger than these.

She put a hand on Stephen's arm: "We will try to understand each other better," she exclaimed.

And although it was exactly the thing he wanted to avoid, yet he slipped an arm about her waist and so parted, not very unhappily after all. Yet, as the train bore him away, he sat in his corner, arms folded and forehead frowning, trying to make out his bearings in this very tempestuous sea.

But he had, unfortunately, no compass by which to steer since the complexity of the situation was immensely increased by the fact that Molly, belonging to one rank by birth, was straining herself to breathe the air of another that was not hers by training and habit.

In the end, it was Billy Knyvett who brought matters to a crisis. He alone had been informed by Stephen of the understanding with Miss Woodruffe and was full of congratulatory sentiments when he met her returning from the station. To Molly, poised as she was between what she desired and what was attainable, his tone was unbearable. He spoke of Anerley's prospects, of his work: "provincial journalism," commented Molly to herself with an angry compression of her lips. Next he went on to the great assistance she would be to a man who might even hope, with luck, for a political career. That he regarded this marriage which Molly herself despised as pre-eminently suitable was clear. She felt lowered in her own estimation by his valuation of her.

To find her mother in possession of the facts, contrary to her request to Stephen, was the last blow to the girl's offended dignity.

"You're not only ungrateful, you're deceitful," stormed Mrs. Woodruffe; "you distinctly told me there was no engagement."

"Nor is there. I refused to be bound, and I am not."

"Let me tell you, miss, that being more honest than you, he told me everything."

"That's likely," snapped Molly.

"Likely or not, it's the truth. I should have thought you would have looked higher than a beggarly chap like that. But you never had any sense of what is due to me. Neither had your father, for he chose just the occasion to die when his affairs were in absolutely irretrievable confusion."

"Do be quiet, Mother," cried Molly. "All the ancient grievances of years and years ago are raked up over and over again every time you have a headache. I'm dead tired of this parrot talk."

"I shall go away to Australia and you'll never see me again," sobbed Mrs. Woodruffe; "then you'll be sorry you treated me so shameful."

In moments of rage she recurred to the speech of her youth.

The next morning, Molly, whose temperament was as quick as lightning, and who either galloped through her work or left it undone, announced her intention of going up to the moor for a day.

There was, in fact, one valley which, whenever possible, she had made a practice of visiting each year ever since the most delightful holiday of her childhood had been spent there. It was called in her own private language

The Enchanted Valley, and although she was unaware of the fact, was actually the corner of earth from which her mother's family had originally sprung.

One of the healthiest instincts in her life was to go back to the country at all moments of stress and there to wait till the quietude had cooled the hurrying pulses. It is a sort of natural fatalism, the fine heritage of those in whose veins there flows the well of country blood.

But yesterday's bitter blows rankled still and gave something of desperation to the mood with which she encountered Archer Bellew at the corner of the road above the station. There he stood, bareheaded at her approach and smiling, as though whole storm-tossed ages had not passed between the last time she saw him and the present moment.

"Whither away?" cried he, his eyes twitching as they had a habit of doing when his nerves were especially alive.

But at his merry tones Molly wondered at herself, for in what strange, self-created world of misery had she not been living? With eyes bedazzled and spirits gone up to bounding point, she walked along by his side and listened, while he proposed to accompany her on her day's excursion.

"Glory be!" he said, "I've got the vision on me! Two thousand words a day and the mind running clear on its tracks. Don't you think I've earned a holiday? Besides, it'll clear my brain. What! you surely haven't any scruples, have you? Molly, don't be a goose."

She knew perfectly well that the strength had gone from her to refuse him anything; this one day, she said to herself, putting off the moment of repentance to the Greek Kalends.

In wildly hilarious spirits he took the tickets and hurried her into the train. Once alone in the carriage, he slowed down, passed his hand across his forehead and exclaimed: "Well, I'm tired!"

He was evidently paying now for the strained conditions under which he had been living for the last few days. With a thousand inward reproaches at her own weakness, Molly compared his strenuous days of labour with her feverish ones. Seeing the shadow on her face, he leant forward and took her hands in his; his quickness in noting moods was, indeed, his readiest passport to a woman's heart.

"What is it?" he asked, looking in her eyes that were not far off from tears.

Desire to see herself once again the subject of his thoughts took on the guise of penitence.

"I ought not to have come," she whispered, "for since I saw you last——"

"Yes? Tell me. You know you can say what you like to me and I shall understand."

It was her bitterest thought to know this true, for it suggested so many comparisons. Here was a man who would not lay a bundle of dried hay before her and call it sweet; with him she might confidently pick her way amid succulent herbage.

"When you left me and took no notice of me, I hated you and I let him kiss me. Yes, Stephen, I mean. He thinks he is engaged to me."

For answer Bellew lay back and laughed aloud.

"You're cruel," she cried; "you hurt me very much. I did not think you would be like that."

He crossed to her side, slipped an arm behind her head, his hand beneath her chin and so turning her face up to his, cried: "Forgive me."

Cup-like she held her lips while he drank from them, at first sipping daintily and then more fiercely till her head fell back against his arm. His touch flamed through her till she knew the difference between the false dawn and the true.

"Don't you mind what I did?" she asked.

"They're but the sweeter," he said with a smile, looking at her lips.

Nor did Molly care to trace the thought, for it was the essence of Bellew's attraction for her that when they were together their life seemed one, without hint of underlying antagonism of any sort.

Sun warmed and sweet, over granite boulders where hang tufts of gorse that send golden lights across the deep brown pools, the river slips down the Enchanted Valley. Hills, grassy, patched with young bracken and scarred with grey stones, enfold it; only its swaying murmur, rising and falling like a pulse, can be heard to the summits where the sun beats down in dizzying splendour. The cry of the mountain lambs, thin and sweet and infinitely mournful, is a fitting expression for the moorland solitude at the end of the pass where the tors lie outstretched, prone monsters clad in stretches of heather. Here in wider valley flows the main stream, joined by a rushing torrent from a narrow ravine where a spring rises from the hillside, its path between craggy boulders marked by the bright green of young trees. In this hoar, grim place of changelessness the call of the cuckoo sounds strangely out of place, recalling as it does the spirit of woodlands brooding deep in sleep, of easy dalliance and summer ease.

It had been a marvellous spring; day after day the sun rose unclouded and the west wind, rainless and soft, blew steadily. And such clouds as it had brought were swept away at night by the broom from the cool north. The long sunny hours were marked but by bird calls or silences, by drone of bees, or sheep cries. And at night the sky was clear as though above a desert. Old folks spoke of summers forty years agone, and in mid-June the country folk were burnt as though by August suns.

Into this radiance stepped Molly and Bellew; here they sat on the rocks while the brown waters sparkled over patches of sand or gloomed across the weedy boulders. One strand of her hair had fallen across her flushed cheek. She might have been an ancestress of her own from the little hut, one room up and one down, with open fireplace and oven built in the wall, where in ancient days her mother's forbears had been reared by the dozen, a healthy, rosy race, though born in a human sty.

When the shadow fell across them from the hillside, Bellew bestirred himself. A roaring fire having been made of stubs gathered from the hillside with careful treading for fear of snakes, the viper or the rarer adder, he went up to the village for kettle and tea materials and soon returned laden. Tea over, they lay to windward of the fire, its blue smoke trailing up the valley like a mist.

Then, by a stretch of intimacy more delightful than any mere caress, he took her into the sanctuary of his mind where he had gathered up the sweetness of sensation by which he lived.

"Do you know," said he, "that at the corner of the lane just now I had a wonderful moment. I was waiting opposite the old cottage for the pitcher to fill. The heavy trees swayed overhead, and underneath their branches the light shone. Beyond I could see the blue of the hills. At the scent of hawthorns I was back in the past—of how many ancestors, I wonder! All that I, too, had ever lived, I seemed to live again; all the women I have ever loved, they seemed a part of me. All the joy and pain that ever my nerves had known came back."

Then he noticed her face.

"Does it hurt you, dear, to hear of those women?" he asked. "It needn't, for I could not love you so well had they not left their sweet thoughts with me. We weave strands of dark or light into the web of our life; they come back years afterwards as they did at the lane end just now, and we see what we have done."

He talked on of the things he had seen, of the men and women he had known, of the endless procession of sensations that is the artist's life, till Molly found herself receding into the distance. She could never be the centre of the stage here, or only for so short a while that it seemed a mere moment. An intense loneliness began to close round her; his life, with its big sweep of the past, seemed nearly as foreign to her own as did the hills and rocks all round them. He was like an ancient house of memories; she seemed but a jerry-built villa.

Then she felt a physical chill fall on her and following her glance, Bellew looked up and exclaimed. Over the shoulder of the Longstone Hill, gathering across the wastes deeper in on the moor, was coming a procession of clouds, inky black at the edges. The wind was shaking the trees. Low growls of thunder came from the left; it was of ill omen, thunder from the left, thought Molly, as following Archer, she leapt to her feet.

"Come," said he, "we must hurry." Hastily grasping the scattered tea things, nor stopping to stamp out the fire, he led the way down the valley. At the crossing-stones the first big drops fell and the darkness gathered. He made her slip on his coat and run. The quarry pool by the viaduct was leaden now; there the great clumps of trees round the brink shone like masses of green curd in the half-light. Near by stood a square hut, shuttered and bolted.

"I'm going to burgle," cried Bellew; "we shall get drenched if we stay here out of cover."

The long rusty screws that held the wooden shutters across the window yielded at last and smashing a pane of the little leaded window, he opened it and crept in, pulling Molly after him. With the roar of the rain on the corrugated iron roof and the rattle of thunder overhead they stood deafened, while the wet lay sleek and shining on clothes and dripping hats.

The place was fitted with three tiers of sleeping berths, one above the other. Over the open fireplace, blackened with smoke, hung a crook, and a pile of gorse and brushwood lay in a wood-box by the side. From the cracked walls cobwebs hung and rough pencil sketches had been scrawled on the boards above the mantel. It was evidently a camping place; even now a store of rugs and blankets lay piled up on the great bags of straw that formed the bedding. Matches, their boxes overcrusted with mould, lay on the grocery shelf by the door and presently Bellew had managed to set a light to the fire, while Molly tried to see her flushed face and rain-drenched hair in the round, gilt-edged looking-glass over the fireplace.

Through the window they had smashed came the sweet scent of the rain-drenched moor that mingled with the pungency of the wood-smoke which puffed across the room. It seemed now, in the silence that was following the storm, a place cut off from the world, a place where one could forget the jarring wheels of life. It was almost still enough to hear the spiders spin their webs upon the walls.

Then over the bridge that spanned the gorge, a freight train passed with a rush and a roar; she could hear the lowing of the prisoned beasts as the trucks rattled across the gulf, for the vortex of the city had sucked in even these.

The sound stirred thought, since all the day she had been asking an unspoken question. For herself she had made the irrevocable leap that means decision, but Bellew's mind was unfathomable to all her probing. Almost for the first time she beat herself against the bars of his nature, questioning, asking to be admitted to his thoughts; weary, angry, at last she started up and declared that, storm or no storm, they must go. But he took out his watch and showed her that they need not start for another hour. By that time the storm would have passed over.

Then he flung a straw pillow on the ground by the fire for her and pulled her down beside him. Laying her hand across his knee, he stretched the fingers apart; he knew now that he had a meaning to convey to her, a subtlety that roughly handled would give pain, but too delicately touched upon, must remain ambiguous. For Molly, hot to rush upon the fulfilment of her nature, had scarcely an inkling of the pitiful slenderness of the thread on which Bellew's happiness was poised. He laughed inwardly at the whimsical situation she was creating, for while she expected the caresses of passion he was going to dose her with philosophy, himself making a wry face at the mixture he yet expected her to swallow.

Archer Bellew distrusted, not only his own instincts, but the very power of life itself to give satisfaction. He had always, in fact, recoiled from the face of achievement, and even as a boy had wept over the prizes he had gained and built glorious fancies round the prizes he had lost. The habit of dreading accomplishment had grown with his growth. Even his career, wonderful as it seemed to others, had a core of bitterness which he would have escaped had he never succeeded. For it was built—and he knew it to be—not on the solid honesty of ascertained fact but on the shifting sands of a freakish personality. His writing was highly coloured, hectic, even when most realistic, tinged with the glitter of the footlights, not steeped in the quiet noonday. Falsely true, it rang a note that deafened contemporary ears but would not be taken as history in time to come.

Here again achievement was far less satisfactory than vision; he even envied the great unprinted, one of whom had told him of the joy derived from a typewritten manuscript that reposed in a drawer. All the fame in the world, or so it seemed to him, would never yield the solid satisfaction of a virgin creation unsullied by the coarse hands of the world. So he talked of common joys, but held aloof from the procession; envied the sweetness of the wild rock-honey, but never gathered it.

"Molly," he said tenderly, stooping down and looking in her eyes, "don't let us play at cross purposes."

Her voice shaking, she said "Yes," and waited for the rest.

He got up restlessly, and leant his shoulder against the mantelpiece, while he asked himself angrily why in the world were human beings trained to be so matter-of-fact in their views. For he himself at the present moment seemed vainly grasping at gossamer curtains that blinded him.

He dreaded failure so much that he kept silence, while Molly began wildly to throw out her hands, not knowing whom she fought, nor what precipice she was approaching.

"I do not think we shall see very much of one another after this," she said, trying to speak coldly. "I shall be going away shortly. And then I suppose you will be starting for Egypt. By the time you come back I shall be married."

"Molly," he asked, "do you really care for Anerley?"

At the point-blank question, she hesitated. But with the woman's instinct against burning her boats, shirked the answer. Nor, of course, did she really know it.

"Oh," she cried furiously, "he schools me and you torture me. I wish I had never seen either of you."

"Then you do care for me? Molly, do you care very, very much?" he cried, irresistibly carried away with the desire to feed his own vanity.

"How dare you?" exclaimed she. "You are playing a mean, unmanly part, trying to make me show myself as weak as you think me. I'll have no more of it. Foolish, wicked, I may have been, but I'll not go on with it. You don't care. This day even has been nothing to you, nothing but something more to add to your memories. A collector of Turkish delight, that's what you have become. But it's somewhat stale, after all." And blindly she began to look for her hat and its pins.

"It is," said he quietly, "that I don't want to spoil things."

"To spoil things? What do you mean?" she asked, quieted by his tone.

"We human creatures are always doing that. We are like children that with a dainty meal before them, cram their mouths greedily full, swallow gluttonously and miss all the delicate savours."

"Why don't you say plainly what you mean?" she asked contemptuously.

"Don't you see that I am trying to say something very difficult?"

"Then say it. You only frighten me by all this beating about the bush."

"I want," said he slowly, "to keep the preciousness of our—friendship, of our love, unspoilt. That is what I have been trying to say all this time. Everyone transforms love and friendship into something crude, even ugly. They think that love means possession, and friendship, eternal companionship. It is not so. Love and friendship are delicate, lovely things that must not be coarsely swallowed. If so they lose their beauty—become even hideous. That is why weariness, hatred even, follow on marriage. You know how beautiful an untouched stretch of bracken looks, how hideous when beaten down."

"Yes," said she faintly, "but wounded, it gives out a sweet smell."

To what far distances he was driving her, she could not tell, but into her brain was stealing a perception of his meaning.

"I wouldn't ruin a beautiful thing by laying rough hands on it," he went on. "Once I did that. I was young then. We both were mere tyros at life. The misery, the shame, of the after-fruits, I shall never forget. Love turned—in me at any rate—to something more like hatred than anything else. But I have forgotten, it was so long ago."

He spoke dreamily, passing his hand over his eyes.

"Molly, can't you understand?"

"Yes," she said, turning cold and white. "Yes, I understand. At least I think so. But I don't know. It is all so bewildering."

She was becoming faint and he helped her to sit down. Leaning her head on her hand, she stared at the fire, dying now into hot ash.

"I would not hurt you for the world," he said miserably. "But ask yourself, have we not as it is the best of it all? Love, friendship, tenderness? Think what intrigues, what subterfuges, what sordid details we should have to live through? Do you not shrink from it all?"

She had never thought of them, did not now, even while he spoke. She had imagined the joy of life shared in common, of wakings and sleepings, of interests ever growing, of that garnering up of homely memories that transforms the trivial by the divine alchemy of love. Now only a flood of loneliness, the sense of being outcast, poured over her.

Her instinct of honesty, such as it was, revolted from the unreality of it all. He talked of subterfuges, but what worse subterfuge could be than to shirk the open deed that ought to follow on the thought by that close linking of the law of life which we disregard at our peril?

Stephen, matter-of-fact, conceited, hide-bound in convention, was better than this. His ladder, mayhap, led nowhere near the stars, but at any rate there were no broken stairways on it.

Bellew went away to the village without a word; he had to arrange for the refastening of the hut and to return the things he had borrowed.

When he returned she met him with outstretched hands; she had wrestled through her first moment of anger, had accepted the situation, yet with untold scorn of him.

"We must not meet again," she cried, "for I am only of very coarse clay. I must get used to understanding this. I have to forget."

Unknown to herself, she was making a last wild appeal to the fibres of manliness in him. But in vain; in one sense he was miserable, yet somewhere at the back of him, the imp he carried in his brain enjoyed the drama of it all. He could even see the scene on the stage.

Then her sweetness overcame him and he took her in his arms. One lock of her hair fell across his eyes and blinded him. He felt the softness of her breast against his.

At that the real torment began, since he knew that for a cast of the dice, she was his, a cast, indeed, of the dice cogged by nature. Like a drowning man, he saw all his past and knew himself one who, being given a thing, straightway wished for another. One woman had contributed one thing to his life; another woman, something different; he loved the poppy-red woman for her fire of life; the wit, for her salt of satire; the child for her naive delight in the dawn of her powers.

He was a butterfly in a garden; no honey-bee. Nor could he sink to the last level of meanness.

He put her gently away and helped her out of the hut. Between the dripping trees that shed the sweetness of minute drops all round them, they walked almost in silence. White-faced and strained, they said good-bye at the other end with scarcely any feeling save that of utter weariness. They were, indeed, like men whose hearing has been destroyed by the incessant firing of shot.

But, unknown to themselves, their parting was noticed by the last two persons in the whole world whom they would have chosen to view it.

"Did you see that, Peter?" asked Mr. Knyvett, after a pause, during which they had listened to the receding footsteps tracing separate paths.

Peter Westlake nodded.

"Something wrong there," he said.

"Something very wrong," answered the other.

They plodded on in silence, each man's mind following the same line of thought, for they were reflecting on the helplessness of even the best will in the world in face of the interactions of character.

"You see," said Billy at last, "I can't bear to think that Sara is somehow, though remotely and unconsciously, involved in any harm that may come to that girl. Of course, she isn't really implicated, but still——"

Peter nodded, wondering rather to see that even Billy, apart from Sara, scarcely realised the bitterness of the girl's fate. Though he checked the thought as disloyal, it persisted.

"This is a matter in which you can't appear," said he. "Nor, of course, can any man. Besides, we shall be away out of it soon."

"Thank God for that," said Knyvett piously. "I really feel inclined to carry somebody off and go."

"Sort of 'Once aboard the lugger and the maid is mine,'" smiled Peter. "Well, I don't mind confessing that I feel just the same. But I don't really see how you can make up your mind to leave things in such a mess."

"I must," said Knyvett shortly, beginning to walk at a prodigious rate, so that the little man by his side could scarcely keep pace with him. "What good can I do by staying here? As you say, I can do nothing. The whole damned thing's like a ghastly tumour that's got to go on growing till it's ripe, so to speak."

"But you can't sit down and watch it ripen. No, I see," said Peter.

When close-pressed by circumstance and without the chance of action, Knyvett always felt that curious restriction of the brain which is a foreshadowing of the shadow of insanity. It was the passivity of endurance through days and nights that goaded him to incessant wandering, now that by his own folly he had cast aside his profession.

"It wants a woman, does this job," continued Peter, "a woman who's not directly involved in the affair. Anne's too close to Sara to be any real good. Why not get Mrs. Knyvett to come down and lend a hand?"

Secretly he lived in dread lest the cruise of the *Pendragon* should be postponed. Peter had never been out of harness before and at the prospect of unlimited freedom no bean-fed horse could have rioted in more obstreperous spirits—internally, of course. Having lived all his life in gardenless brick streets, having warmed himself at a smug gas fire most of his days, he was possessed by a wander-lust that was strong in proportion to the straitness of the bars which had confined him. Born in a Midland manufacturing town, he had always kept at the back of his mind a sick, but apparently hopeless, craving "for to admire and for to see." Every penny of spare cash went in travel books and latterly in far unholier literary ways. He longed for stronger meat than jog-trot wander books; he wanted to tear the heart out of strange forms of existence. It was for the exotic, the bizarre, that he craved, for any contrast to the grey-blues of English clouds, to the long oval of English faces. He wanted the dry light, the unwinking gaze of southern suns. He even hated the yellowy lichened branches of English lanes and flung himself hungrily into "Le Roman d'un Spahi" and the "Voyage en Orient." Often he would stand gazing into the window of a picture shop while, instead of the smell of fog-smoke, there came to his nostrils the scent of the bazaar, to his ears, in place of the street racket, the call of the muezzin. It was, this call of the unknown, to his Nonconformist conscience, like some unholy lust arising in the blood of a virgin.

"I'll do it," exclaimed Billy at last. "I've thought of it several times. It will break up her plans hopelessly, of course. But I think she'll do it."

He wrote, therefore, the same night, suggesting that during his voyage to the Magellan Straits, Mrs. Knyvett should take a furnished house in Dartmouth.

"You know me well enough," he wrote, "to be sure that I shouldn't ask you, did I not feel that you could put in a good piece of work here, a bit of work you'll be glad to have done, too; one that only a woman with your knowledge of the world could possibly put through.

"No, old lady, 'tisn't flattery or flummery, but just the bare truth. Things down here that involve one very dear to me are bound up in the most hopeless tangle God ever knew. You're wanted to unloose the Gordian knot with the sword of your uprightness. To change the figure, you may break a few eggs, for I know your methods, mater, but I do truly believe you'll make the omelet. Come, come, come. I shouldn't ask you if it wasn't serious, or if I could do it myself."

He sat smiling, pen in hand, while he pictured his mother insidiously planning the removal of an obnoxious tenant by cunning devices and when they succeeded, joyfully exclaiming:

"Ain't I an old devil?"

The answer came next day by wire; it was characteristic and apparently final, but Billy by no means gave up hope. It ran:

"Quite impossible. Up to eyes in engagements in town. Slay someone; human knots cannot be cut without slaughter. Killing no murder in this case."

Evidently written on the spur of the moment, concluded Billy, as he read a communication which must surely have struck the operator as a cipher message.

The second telegram arrived a few hours later, as Mr. Knyvett had indeed expected. "Will put hand to plough," said this one, and her son drew a breath of relief as he read it. For Mrs. Knyvett was not one of those who readily turn back, even when the going is very heavy.

CHAPTER IX

THE UNDYING PAST: BEING VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF MOTHERHOOD

THE picture standing on an easel in Margaret Rossiter's studio at Chelsea was in strange contrast to the rest of the room, with its tapestry-covered divan running round three sides, its carved oak writing bureau and polished floor. For in all these there was that perfect fitting of satisfaction to requirement which civilisation demands, whereas the subject of the picture went back to instincts so primitive that the origin of them is lost in the mists of the ages.

A flock of ewes fought for entrance at the closed doors of a great barn built of rough-cast and thatch; as they slipped in the mire of the yard in their struggle with each other, their fleecy backs were as expressive of the lust of battle as the swelling muscles of a prize-fighter. The surrounding scenery was that of the salt marshes and they fought for admission to their lambs, now shut within the barn; in their eagerness they were even pushing the shepherd away from the door, since one instinct had conquered another. Over the whole shone the luminous glow of an evening in spring; in the management of the light and of the bodily expression of the flock lay the strength of the painting.

Cross-legged on the divan, under the high north light, sat the painter of it, furiously puffing out cigarette smoke as she always did when her work was submitted to a new visitor. The two fingers between which projected the cigarette were deeply stained with nicotine, a mark due to the fact that Margaret Rossiter generally smoked while she painted and frequently held the cigarette till it smouldered down to the hot end and thus aroused her from her absorption.

In front of the picture, lorgnette in hand, stood Mrs. Knyvett. She was a tall, massively-built woman whose pale blond hair was scarcely touched with visible grey, though she was long past fifty. Arranged chignon-fashion and parted in front under a small hat placed well forward on the forehead, this hair irresistibly recalled certain illustrations by Leech. In her pose, too, there was an air of conscious capability reminiscent of the "managing bodies" of that generation. Her eyes of vivid blue were fringed with long pale lashes which matched the tufted eyebrows. It was noticeable that the wrinkles of the neck were as deeply marked as though she were a field-worker, instead of a woman of wealth and leisure.

"Good, isn't it?" said the painter, frankly jubilant. "I've got the light I wanted, and the fighting grip of the legs. You see," she said, springing up and sweeping an explanatory forefinger over the picture, "I had to get all the expression into those back legs and to do that meant sweat, sweat, sweat. But I've got it and when you feel you've done that, the whole world might crumble into atoms and you wouldn't so much as *want* to say a swear word."

Mrs. Knyvett laughed delightedly, for nobody in the world, except the painter herself, was happier than she when success followed hard on effort and joy on both. And truth to tell, when things went ill with Margaret Rossiter she was quite the crossest, gloomiest person in the world.

Round her wild mop of hair, which she wore piled up in coils, she had wound a scarlet handkerchief. Much meditation had given her three chins and she had a habit of looking out of the corners of her grey eyes under their arched eyebrows. The two deep vertical lines between the eyes and the network of radiating wrinkles round their corners had been produced by much painting out of doors. The ruddy tan of her face was well in keeping with the flying locks that always contrived to look wind-swept. "Anemone," the wind-flower, was her private peculiar name; some people added the epithet "elderly," but no one, save herself, ever wanted her younger, for time and chance had made her a woman instead of a Dresden china figure.

"But," cried Mrs. Knyvett, suddenly catching sight of the word "Mothers!" painted on the frame, "I don't like that title 'Mothers!' We don't want any more sentiment about that kind of thing. There's too much by half already. For there isn't any face in the world less to be envied than that of a mother."

"That wasn't sentiment," answered Margaret, nodding towards the picture. "I only wanted to register a fact, for they are mothers you see. And as for motherhood, what on earth can I know about it?"

"Well, anyway," said Mrs. Knyvett, "the little originals of that picture are already mutton and *their* motherhood is at an end. Yes, Margaret," she continued, answering a look of enquiry, "I'm worried nearly to death."

The painter stooped to set a match to the spirit kettle. She said nothing for a moment, because she had all the time been longing to get at the cause of the trouble she divined.

Nearly all her year was spent out of London in far-away fishing villages, or Breton farms, or amid the greyness of the sand dunes, which she had learnt to know in all their moods. Quite alone in the world, she lived for her work, trying to paint the joys and sorrows of poor folk, but learning to understand them first. For that last reason she usually avoided artist colonies where between themselves and the life around them the clannishness of the artists sets a wall. Nor, indeed, was Margaret Rossiter ever really at home in towns; always to her, town life had a certain vulgarity which nothing in the world, no amusements, no ease, no friendships, could entirely conceal.

Like Molly Woodruffe, she felt the country in her blood, but with Margaret it was a conscious inheritance, for her cradle had been set under a row of beech trees that sheltered the garden of a hill farm; her first perception of the fulness of joyous life had come among the meadow grasses; her first sense of happy peace from the hot, sunny hum of the flies in a great farm kitchen. One of her earliest recollections was of a cowshed at milking-time, herself a small figure on a three-legged stool, with the old cowman encouraging her first efforts: "You'm barely tickling of her, my dear. Her's looking round to see what flea's jumping. Rare big fingers, bain't 'em?" It was subjects such as these that she painted best, for the feel of them was in her blood.

"I haven't," continued Mrs. Knyvett, "so much as closed my eyes for the night. Just read that," she exclaimed, throwing her son's letter across the tea-table.

Margaret read it carefully, once turning back to compare the last paragraph with an earlier one.

"You see what it all means, don't you?" said Mrs. Knyvett. "The whole thing is as plain as possible, though Billy always does write like a Greek oracle. There's some fresh trouble brewing close at home, perhaps even a scandal, where Sara Hereford—I always call her Hereford still because nobody could look upon her as really married to that fellow—will be in the thick of it. Billy himself never can stand looking on to see other people suffer, so I'm to rush down and bear his suffering vicariously, or perhaps pluck his beloved as a brand from the burning. Now can't you see me doing it?"

She flung up her hands towards her hat and began impatiently fumbling for the pins. Margaret's manner had changed from gay and light-hearted to very still and constrained.

"Why not?" she asked curtly.

"Why not? Because I should be a regular bull in a china shop. My first impulse would be to take them all by the scruff of the neck and knock their silly heads together. And I suppose you don't imagine that that would do any good?"

"I think," said Margaret slowly, with eyes that were fixed and dreamy, "that if you gave your mind to it you might help to set things on a better footing. If it can be done," she added, looking significantly into Mrs. Knyvett's face.

"Fact is," said the elder woman frankly, "I'm just funking it. I've wired to Billy to say that nothing on earth would induce me to give up my season in town, but of course if Billy really wanted me to go to the North Pole, I should do it, if it would be any help to him."

Margaret could not fail to see the reasonableness of Mrs. Knyvett's doubts as to her own fitness to deal with this matter. For although a woman of great ability, she was but little accustomed to the handling of difficult human situations. The daughter of a commander in the Navy, who, since he had no son, had brought her up boy-fashion, she had learnt in childhood to ride, to shoot straight, and to speak the truth. From this training she had acquired a sort of quarter-deck heartiness and scorn of finesse. All her life, too, had been spent in the straightforward management of business affairs, for when left a widow with one son, during his minority she had administered, in his name, the two large estates in England and Wales that had descended to him, and when he came of age he had firmly refused to take the management from her. His own work was more than enough for him and he knew that to take her business from his mother would be to strike away half her life.

In this way she had for years been accustomed to say: Do this, and instantly to see it done. Every fence, every barn, every house on her estates was in first-class working condition and on her pilgrimages of inspection she passed over the land like an invigorating wind, for she knew the localities better than her bailiffs and judged the characters of her tenants with a feminine shrewdness that left the men of affairs far in the rear. Nor when changes were required by changing conditions did she shrink from them and one reason why the Knyvett lands prospered was that, when modern times called for small holdings, she refused to cling to large ones. Although very far from being hard-hearted, she was never one of those who, as she put it, "tried to freeze jellies with last year's ice," so that when an old retainer was obviously too old for his work, she passed sentence quickly, but saw that he was well pensioned and supplied with every comfort. "Short, sharp, and up to the knocker," such was the verdict of her own people.

In the same style had she dealt with her son, from the time that the most important matter in his life was the quality of the milk he drank up to the period when he had to choose his profession. Here, with her entire goodwill, he had flown in the face of all the prejudices of his father's family and hers, for Mrs. Knyvett was one of the rare people who never seem to suffer from that arrested brain-development which is one of the most fruitful sources of friction in the world. The pity of it all was that Fate should have restricted her to such a small area of effort as one son and two estates, for she was made of the stuff from which great men are born, or still more truly, perhaps, of the calibre that finds its true development in bridge-building.

The upheaval in her son's life that followed on his disappointment over Sara Hereford's marriage was inexplicable on any theory known to her. She simply bore with it, as one does with some cataclysm of nature against which it is entirely useless to struggle. Since marriage in her case had been merely an episode that gave her a son, she was inclined to underestimate the importance of affairs of the heart in the business of life. It was, of course, conceivable that a man's more important undertakings might be disorganised for a few months by the necessity for choosing a mate. With careless management and bad luck such disorder might conceivably last even a few years. But to allow this *bouleversement de sexe* to continue for a longer period was to write oneself down as an insane neurotic. In her opinion, indeed, the oversexualisation of the world was one of the greatest hindrances to wise living.

For such a woman as this to see her son cast away his chances of fine work and spend years in dancing attendance on a woman whom he could neither help nor win was nothing short of a tragedy. For, as with so many women, her eggs were all in one basket. Yet practically no one, except Margaret Rossiter, saw it in that light, for she took no one into her confidence and kept a stoical front to the world.

"You see," said Margaret, "if you don't go, you'll be worrying yourself all the time. And if anything goes very wrong you'll never forgive yourself."

"And if I do go, he'll never forgive me for the muddle I shall make of things. What's come over me, I can't tell, but I've got a horror of the whole thing. But if I should make matters worse he would never forgive me," she repeated.

She got up and, in a quite systematic way, began to clear a path between the spindle-legged tables and chairs where she could pace up and down. As a girl she had travelled with her father in the East and there had learnt the comfort of barefoot walking. Even now her shoes were of the softest material and made to fit like gloves, so that there was something suggestive of the gait of a large, comfortable panther in the way she padded up and down the studio.

"I believe it's the second-rate people mixed up in this affair who annoy me most," she exclaimed, "but I needn't tell you that I'm not referring merely to rank when I say that."

Margaret nodded, waiting patiently till this fever-fit should wear itself out, for she knew that Mrs. Knyvett was, just now, very much in the mood of a man who is fitting on an irksome suit of armour. By the time this was done, she felt sure that a second telegram would be sent. Should her expectation, however, be unfulfilled she yet had an arrow that she might find courage to shoot on her own account, for she cared for Mrs. Knyvett well enough to wish to spare her the self-reproach of one who has failed in a duty.

"What sort of a woman is Sara Hereford ?" she asked abruptly ; "do you like her ?"

"She's very hard to describe," said Mrs. Knyvett, perceptibly brightening when something, however trivial, was given her on which she could exercise her mind. "She doesn't say much and I don't know that she does much. But you always feel she's there. People revolve round her, don't you know, and consider how things will affect her. They get into the habit of wondering whether her life is as happy as it ought to be. That's the Hereford gift, in fact. Old Vin's just the same, though he's carelessly selfish and expects to be made the centre. I don't know that Sara does, but the result is much the same, anyway. And there's another thing ; you know we're all of us entirely different according to the people we happen to be with at the time. You might call Sara dull, perhaps, but with Billy present she's a different being. She lights up, she's alive. I can even understand his longing for her when I see them together, for she would round his life and he hers. Of course only because they each think that of the other. But they do think so and then it's true for them. But what I can't bear to think of is that Billy should dangle. *My* son dangle! Just think of it, Margaret."

"Do you know, Esther," said the other quietly, "that when I feel sickened at men's ways, and want to think of a man as he ought to be, I always think of Billy."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Mrs. Knyvett, "inside him, of course, that is so. But one judges of a man by what he does, not by what he is."

"And not always wisely, perhaps," said Margaret musingly.

"Billy will never force her, you know," went on Mrs. Knyvett, following her own train of thought; "what she does, she'll have to do of her own initiative. I trained him to think like that," she said, her voice breaking a little over the last words; "I always taught him that a woman isn't a thing to be captured, to be bought or sold. She is responsible for herself, she must stand on her own feet. But, oh, Margaret, how long will he wait? It's spoiling his whole life. And, anyway, if *It* should happen, if she should cut the traces, that'll be the end of any chance of a public career for him. God! as if there weren't enough women in the world that would do for him!"

Worst of all, perhaps, as her listener knew, was the fear that perhaps out of such training as she had given was Billy born quixotic, patient, faithful, but unstable and incapable of beating down a private sorrow by the hard iron flail of work and enterprise. Yet against such a conviction Mrs. Knyvett fought tooth and nail.

"Billy's his father over again," she said; "you know we only had a year of married life together and then he died, but not before I had learnt one thing about him—that he had that sort of legal mind which sees both sides of a question so clearly that it always weighs things equally, which always sees so much good in things as they are, so much possible evil in reforms that it never does anything at all. That's Billy all over, except when you set him down with some big job which just has to be done, some gulf that must be spanned, some country opened up. There isn't any room for doubt in work like that.

That's why he's ready to fly half round the world and look for fairy gold to make Peter Westlake happy!"

She laughed bitterly at her own fierce jibes, while Margaret crossed the room and stood leaning on the mantelpiece with her head on her crossed hands.

"And what about Archer Bellew?" asked she at last in curiously cold, indifferent tones. "He's very much like the thirteenth guest, isn't he, in every story where he intervenes?"

"The man is a thing to shrink from," exclaimed Mrs. Knyvett vigorously. "If there were no other reason in the world against my meddling in this business, there would be one in this—that I could scarcely keep myself from joining in any plan that would rid a decent woman of that ghoul. Sara Hereford's no particular favourite of mine, but she doesn't deserve that fate, anyway."

Margaret laughed outright at her vehemence.

"He's only a thing that results from the theory of Art for Art's sake, Esther. And the girls he studies are only martyrs on that altar after all. I myself am perhaps the one person in the world who knows the very worst that can be said against Archer Bellew."

"Fiddlesticks! Altar of art, indeed, altar of his own selfish unmanliness! He turns them inside out for his own benefit, if that's what you mean by Art for Art's sake and then goes away and tells what he knows. Fifty times better if he played Tom Jones or Don Juan, or whatever you call it, with them. There, it's out! I'm no prude, as you know, Margaret, but I suppose that's the most immoral thing I've ever said in my life. But this is the age for saying what everybody thinks but nobody dares to say. Which is an Irish bull and no mistake," she added, with her loud laugh learnt in the open air. "He's no man, for he's ashamed to risk the consequences of manliness. Tell you what, Margaret, if I were to go down there I should just try to saddle him with one of the biggest scandals ever heard of. I never could bear to see a child play with fire but what I wanted him to get burnt a bit, so as to teach him. Master Archer would be the better for the lesson Fidgety Phil wanted."

If ever an elderly Puck in a chignon waxed merry over a mortal's mishap, it was Mrs. Knyvett then.

"And, oh, Margaret," she added, "a good scandal would save Billy by freeing Sara."

"Not in the present state of the law," said Margaret gravely; "you must remember that, as yet, mere infidelity on the husband's side is part of the added burden which the English law lays on the shoulders of woman by way of strengthening what it is pleased to call the weaker vessel. Only desertion by Archer and refusal of conjugal rights, as well as unfaithfulness by him, would free her."

"Crawl at his feet and be refused perhaps! Why, even I wouldn't ask that of Sara, not even for Billy's sake. No, it's no use my going down."

"You," cried Margaret, "to talk like this! Why, you're like a horse that shies at a fence. I've never known you shirk a disagreeable duty before."

"This is beyond nature, Margaret, and I can't do it; I don't feel it incumbent on me to sacrifice anybody needlessly, uselessly, and least of all myself."

Margaret sat in a kind of dream, knowing instinctively that she was nearing her own fence, knowing also that she would certainly take it. For Mrs. Knyvett was moving in the dark, unaware of the problems actually facing her. It seemed a crime, therefore, for a friend to keep silence, however hard speech might be, however harmful in its consequences. That last thought gave pause, however, for surely speech would be wrong were the consequences inevitably disastrous? But of consequences she could really say nothing definite, for her everything must be flung into the melting-pot of character and no one could tell with absolute certainty what metal would emerge from that cauldron. The hardest thing to contemplate was the knowledge that in all probability the relationship between herself and Mrs. Knyvett would be completely altered by what she had to say, deepened, perhaps, but never quite the same again.

In matters such as this one refers instinctively to literary tastes; in Mrs. Knyvett's opinion Anthony Trollope, with his motive springs of money and position, gave for outside purposes a true enough picture of life; for heights and depths she went to George Meredith, though even such a flame-like passion as his, in her eyes, clouded the perfect noonday of his genius.

To a woman like this it was peculiarly difficult to say what must be said. Yet Margaret knew, as we all know the unspoken truth, that for the sake of friendship Mrs. Knyvett had already pardoned in her that kinship with things primitive and vital which to some minds merely signifies power and to others is the one thing anathema to their trained and civilised instincts. So, trusting herself to that fact like one swaying down a cliff by a rope, she began to free her conscience of the perilous stuff it bore.

"Esther," said she, "you know people often wonder why I am alone. I don't know why they should when there are so many unmarried women nowadays, but they do. Yet I suppose we all know things, though we pretend we don't. Perhaps everybody guesses that once I had—a bad break."

Mrs. Knyvett kept silence, for she had guessed it certainly.

"Why," asked she at length, "are you talking like this now? Has it anything to do with this matter of mine?"

"Yes," said Margaret quietly, "it has everything to do with it and I think you ought to know. Else you will be working in the dark. It explains many things."

She began restlessly to move about the room.

"Must you tell me, Margaret?"

"Yes, I must," answered she quite decidedly.

"I'd rather you didn't. I don't want to know. I'd rather not know," exclaimed Mrs. Knyvett.

"Because you think it would spoil your feeling for me?"

"No, nothing could possibly do that. If you'd committed a murder, I'd——"

"Come and stay with me the night before my execution. Yes, I know. But then I can quite imagine your approving of a murder, but this—is different. But

I must, Esther, I must tell you. I don't feel that it can possibly be right for me to keep quiet any longer."

"Well?" asked Mrs. Knyvett. She guessed, of course, by now what Margaret had to tell, but not precisely the manner of its telling.

The room was dark and quiet. Margaret moved from her seat, set a match to the fire and watched the flame creep along the newspaper behind the lower bar. Even now she was not quite sure that she was going to take the plunge. She wanted something outside herself to decide, and so made up her mind that if the flame caught the wood, it should be kismet; she would speak. Yet, even while she watched, her mind was perfectly certain that the lever she held in her hand would move Mrs. Knyvett to act, and act decidedly. It would alter the whole complexion of things in her eyes. She could not have told why in so many words; it was only instinct that guided her, the same primeval thing which teaches a dog to swim that has never before seen a river.

The wood caught, gave out a hiss and burnt on. Margaret sat down and placed her hands on her crossed knees. She would not have minded telling this story to a man half so much, since it would merely have brought him over to her side. For hers was a weakness that men pardon by instinct, though by reason they condemn. It is the other way round with a woman.

"Just twelve years ago," she began, "there was in a West Country fishing town a young man beginning to get his foot on the ladder as a sketch writer, a novelist of sorts. There he made the acquaintance of a painter, a woman of thirty-two who was a few years older than he. Then it so happened that their work sent them both to a midland town, she to sketch, he to write a series of articles for a London daily. He hated all that hack work, oh, how he hated it. He always wanted to do exactly the thing that nobody would take. She knew, for they were engaged. He hated it so much that for a whole twelve months he worked as a clerk in a bank. But he hated that worse than ever, for he wanted to be free as the birds of the air. And everybody knew how he felt; he made no secret of it whatever. They remembered this when money was missing that could not be traced. It was thought that he had taken it, mainly perhaps because he was a stranger and had been taken on rather carelessly, it seemed. And there were other reasons why they should think it. They did not arrest, for they had no actual proof. Besides, he was a favourite with the manager. But they waited and the cloud of suspicion gathered. The only strange thing was that he did not bolt. That was strange, of course, if he were guilty."

"This was Archer Bellew?"

"Yes, Archer Bellew, before he struck ile with a book that caught the fancy of the public. It was in a midland town that it happened. There were great trees on the old arrow-slit walls of it. They used to send showers of yellow leaves across the river. That was glassy, like a mirror. You could scarcely tell which way it was flowing. His descriptions of rivers mirroring trees are wonderful. He learnt to write them in that town, from that river. It always seemed autumn there."

She was like a sleep-walker. Mrs. Knyvett leant her head on her hand and watched her curiously.

"Then—the woman. His sitting-room was on the ground floor of the house where he lodged. One night, when all the town was talking and she could bear it no longer, she hid and waited till it was late. There was a green-latticed door with laurels at the side of the house. A little, suburban, semi-detached place. The long French windows of his room were ajar. And there he sat staring straight in front of him. Not moving at all.

"It was his face. Not human. Hopeless. To wipe that look off his face, that was all. A clock struck. She counted the strokes, but could not finish. I don't know what the hour was, but late, very late, and silent. The world seemed to be dead still. Then she pushed open the door. He did not help her.

"He was her man and she had to wipe that look from his face. She knew how to do it, for Nature taught her. Hundreds and hundreds of mothers were behind her, you see. They had bred her, had made her what she was. She knew what she had to do. She did it—played the courtesan with the heart of a mother. Only just to wipe that look away! To do that she would have cut herself in bits, to give herself was nothing. That was the way of it.

"He was asleep when she left, asleep like a child. He had not slept for nights. All the rest were like baying hounds, but she put herself between him and them. Night after night she kept the heart in him. Nobody knew, nobody has ever known. Then they found that he was innocent."

"And the woman? She cared?"

"Not much. She had thought him guilty all the time. That didn't make any difference to her, you see."

"And then?"

"And then—she waited. She had done her part. But he avoided her, pretended not to see her, would turn down side streets. At last—it was weeks later in the same room. Only winter—clear and moonlight. Icy, the air tingling with frost. The garden light as day. The panes glittering. Then she asked him, asked him point-blank, what he was going to do, and waited, stifled. 'Plenty of time for that, my dear,' he said. 'We'll talk about that later. Besides, a man doesn't care to marry a spoilt thing.'

"That was all. But he must have been nervous, for his hand slipped. He had been standing with his hat on the back of his head, waving a stick. It slipped somehow and broke the glass in a thousand atoms. I heard its tinkling fall. 'A man doesn't care to marry a spoilt thing.' I never hear glass fall now without hearing that, too."

She sat quite still, her face working, her eyes downcast, while Mrs. Knyvett watched her. Then she lifted her eyes for the first time during the whole story and smiled. She was just a child now.

"You know," said Mrs. Knyvett quietly, "it wasn't really true that she was spoilt. You don't think so now, do you?"

Margaret's eyes leapt, for her friend had answered to the call.

"No," she said. "No. Afterwards I was glad that when the summons came I had had it in me to answer it." She laughed tremulously. "It sounds like an episcopal acceptance of a benefice, doesn't it? But it altered everything."

"Ah, yes."

"There seemed an unseen bar between herself and men. She knew why. They didn't, but she felt it always. That was the way of it. Then she went away to Paris and worked. She felt glad then that she had some money, held the whip hand of him in one way. She felt cruel in those days. But he triumphed in the end, for, though you won't recognise him, he is a great constructive force."

But Mrs. Knyvett cared not a straw for the plaudits of the critics.

"And so that was Archer Bellew as a young man?" she said.

"That was Archer Bellew as a young man. He was twenty-eight then and I thirty-two."

"Margaret," exclaimed Mrs. Knyvett with conviction, "you love the man still."

"I don't know, Esther. I've never seen him since. But when I am by myself I simply cannot bear to be in the same room with a humming bluebottle, for the sound brings back the summer when I was so happy with him. I can see the long white dusty roads with the wild tangle of hedge on either side. I can hear how the wind blew through the trees when he was there. I always dread the open days of spring, the wide light, and the wild growth. They are such a contrast to our grey weariness."

"Margaret, Margaret, after all these years," whispered Mrs. Knyvett. Her hand looked brown as a nut amid the white tangle of hair that now lay against her knee. "Sara Hereford! Sara Hereford!" she exclaimed contemptuously, "when in the world did she feel he was her man? And if she did, there isn't blood enough in her veins to give what you gave."

Suddenly Margaret Rossiter looked up.

"Do you know," she said, "that I'm not really sorry it happened. Or rather, I've often wondered whether I am. For you see, if I'd married him in the ordinary way I don't suppose I should have been a real painter at all. I couldn't possibly then have given all my strength and all my thoughts to my work as I can now. It's husband and child to me. I've never had anything else. And it's taught me all I know."

Mrs. Knyvett acknowledged the truth of this, as she thought of the gallery of homely, truthful pictures of the school of Josef Israels that bore Margaret Rossiter's name.

"And," said Margaret again, "I don't really misunderstand how now, though I did then. He is one who hates above all things to be bound, so that he was driven to repudiate even Nature's tie. It was quite natural, of course, that he should hate me. I had shown him his own weakness. I had, as it were, shamed his manhood. A woman ought never to do that to a man. Oh, yes, I understand him now. Nor, strange as it may seem, do I care a fig for all the other women about whom one hears gossip. They don't seem to matter. They're only shadows, even Sara Hereford."

"Oh, Sara!" exclaimed Mrs. Knyvett contemptuously, nor paused to explain her tone. "But," she continued, "what I'm trying to get at is why you told me just now. Oh, I understand the immediate reason. You wouldn't keep anything in the background that I didn't know. Also you want me to go down to Devonshire; that I saw from the first. But there's a deeper reason than all that. What was it, I wonder."

"Not," said Margaret, "what you're thinking now. I'm looking forward to no re-shuffle of the cards. It's too late for that. True I count myself his wife, and not Sara Hereford, because I've done all for him a woman could, more than she ever has. But we can't get back the years the locust has eaten. I'm changed. Thought, you know, is just like a disease that preys on the looks, though in some eyes it makes one more attractive. But not in Archer's. He always liked youth, rosebud lips and soft hair. He was that sort of man. I thought when I saw

Sara Hereford once that she was always too mature for him."

Before Mrs. Knyvett left, Margaret bethought herself of the one good that comes out of trouble; she had learnt the worth of a friend. And Mrs. Knyvett gave forth no uncertain sound, for she knew the difference between truth and falsehood, nor had the world's conventions any power to bind her sympathies. For once, literary tastes had been misleading, or rather, as is the case with many people, Mrs. Knyvett's instincts ran far ahead of her intelligence.

Alone once more, Margaret Rossiter sat on in the darkening studio, now only lit by the fireglow and the light Mrs. Knyvett had insisted on switching on above the new picture. She knew why that had been done and even smiled a little through the tears that spotted the front of her silver-grey dress with the ruffles on the close-fitting sleeves. It was for her comfort, since the picture was a beautiful thing and she the maker of it.

Yet she wanted the thing she had not. Pictures were good; it was a pleasant thing to know she had something to say and could say it. Yet what changeless things are works of art! They cannot grow, develop, alter and unfold.

She was very glad Sara Hereford had no children; nothing pleased her better than that, not even the sheepfold bathed in luminous glow, as she slipped a hand inside her dress beneath the warm white chalice of her breast.

CHAPTER X

THE FLY ON THE WHEEL: IN THIS CASE THE FISHERMAN SETS HIS NET AND MRS. KNYVETT PLAYS A GAME OF CELESTIAL PATIENCE

When Mrs. Knyvett had once come to a decision she never allowed the grass to grow under her feet. Besides, in this case, there was upon her the haste with which one rushes into a job one would fain put behind one.

Her first move was to drive to Mudie's, where she electrified the attendant by an order such as he had never in his life before received from an elderly lady whose library lists had always hitherto been compiled with extreme propriety. Nor did she diminish his amazement when she explained that her purpose was to "read up" erotic morbidity, speaking in exactly the same tones that a Civil Service student might use in referring to Tamil or a branch of the craft of forestry. Ultimately she departed, bearing a packet of books which should have raised the blush of shame to her elderly brows. This they did not do, however, for having glanced through them cursorily, she came to the conclusion that their authors had not even a bowing acquaintance with life and besides, "she knew much worse things than that" from reality.

Once on board the *Pendragon*, there was not much likelihood that she would continue her erotic studies for, as Margaret Rossiter had expected, she began to be intrigued by the situation. With the quickness of a woman of the world she grasped her cue, which was to act as a freshening wind of change. For the sea on which these people were now afloat was little better than the doldrums where day by day the weary sun looks down on a glassy sea.

"Billy's ill," she said curtly to Peter Westlake, "and something's got to be done."

The two were alone in the yacht saloon.

"Why in the world aren't you away long before this? Here you hang on month after month in a place that for Billy is no better than a pest-house. Why aren't you buccaneering, or mining, or whatever it is you think you are going to get out of that Bodinar, who's no better than a knave that prefers to idle about on a yacht to doing an honest day's work on a collier?"

She spoke angrily, for she always regarded Peter as a sort of satellite whose business in life it was to circle round Billy carrying attendant comforts, just as Billy, in his turn, circled round Sara.

"We're waiting for the worst of the Cape Horn winter to be over. We can't possibly be there till the end of September at earliest."

Just then Billy put his head in and announced his intention of going ashore. The state cabin was already littered with Mrs. Knyvett's luggage, chiefly kit-bag affairs, for she was an old campaigner, and had already given orders to Cornelius never to approach her with any tea save China and never to serve that without dry toast. When the thresh of the oars had receded into the distance, Mrs. Knyvett relaxed and gave a sigh of relief.

"I've never seen him like this before," she said, "for he's strained almost to breaking-point. What about the nights now, for you ought to know since you sleep aboard?"

Then Peter told her, for he had been acting as Mr. Knyvett's secretary for the last few weeks. There was talk, indeed, of finding him work on the Knyvett estates, should the cruise of the *Pendragon* fail to make him a rich man.

"Yes," nodded Mrs. Knyvett, as she listened; "yes. Just as I thought. Now, what the devil, Peter, have you been about to let things come to this pass?"

"I assure you, Mrs. Knyvett, I have done my best, my very best. In fact, I wrote you——"

"Yes, I know," she answered, tapping her foot angrily, "and wrote about as effectively as though you had been hammering in coffin nails with a hair brush. Now tell me the exact position, as far as you know it."

Peter wiped his forehead and told what he knew, which was not much, though what he guessed was a great deal.

Mrs. Knyvett sat in silence for a long while when he had done. She was thinking out probabilities and reading what he was able to tell her in the light of her own knowledge. She remembered that she had proved to her son as a lad, how false is the so-called manliness that satisfies its basest appetites at the cost of the weak, how to call a thing gold when it is really nothing but smut is one of the most foolish things in the world.

It was, in its way, a dreadful moment of reckoning through which she went while Peter sat opposite her, his perplexed eyes screwed up, his affectionate heart full of self-blame. For her son was in part, especially in the way in which he looked at women, what she had made him. With a squaring of her broad shoulders she adjusted the burden of responsibility. And her knowledge of what she had made taught her the exact manner in which he approached this crisis.

The one thing he had determined on was that, on no pretext whatever, would he force Sara, or carry her off her feet. She should not feel, in after years, that what she had done had been by outer compulsion, or fierce betrayal through another's passion. The one thing, as Mrs. Knyvett knew well, that her son could not bear was to feel he had smirched by any urgency of his own impatience the blamelessness of the woman he loved. If ever Sara came to him, it must be by her own volition, because she thought it right and wise to come and not through any weak surrender to passion's claim. So he held himself with an iron hand.

And Billy's mother, who had taught her son that a woman was an individuality that must choose her own way, was perforce obliged to bow to the justice of his decision.

"Peter," said she at last, "you and I care very much for Billy, don't we?"

Peter nodded; he was a man of few words and very simple thoughts, but Mrs. Knyvett, being a simple person herself, understood him very well.

"I want you to answer me a question," she continued. "You used to run a sort of mission hall for seamen and are by way of being a religious man. You know how my son is situated and how Mrs. Bellew has her troubles, though you don't quite know all the complexities of that affair. Now what in your opinion ought to be done? The people in question are tied up all wrong. Anybody can see that with half an eye. Are they tied for ever? And is it by the moral law or only by what happens to be the law of England?"

Peter was silent because he had been beating his head against the wall of this problem over and over again. But the inexorable questioner persisted, mainly because she regarded Mr. Westlake as representing the conventional religious mind.

"And if this prohibition is based on the moral law, Peter, where does that come from? Does it rest on what is good for man and woman, on utility, or is it merely a stone tablet tumbling down out of the blue from some sphere where things are judged by a standard we cannot understand?"

Peter was not as conventional as he seemed. Few people are, in fact, when once you prick below the skin of what they imagine other people regard as fitting, but there was one thing that was sacrosanct to him and that was the letter of the Scriptures.

"I don't think we ought to use sacred phrases lightly," said he, "for one never knows what things they stand for. Only the other day I was reading about all the beautiful ideas that are meant by such a verse as that which tells how the sun stood still over Ajalon."

Peter had approached Christianity from the point of view of the wordless yet instinctive poet. Something, too, of the scholar's instinct was his. Before Mr. Knyvett had helped him to breathe the air of a wider world, his religion had been the one power that had sufficed to release him from the straight bonds of his daily round of folios and ledgers. His sense of beauty had fed for years on Hebrew imagery, his imagination on the idyllic sweetness of the cloudless Syrian blue. From childhood, ever since the days when he had pored over the old wood-cuts in a family Bible, he had been steeped in the biblical atmosphere. He would quote a sonorous phrase from the Authorised Version with the same appreciation of its cadence as a classic scholar might bring to the chased metal work of a passage from Virgil. In the stern old-fashioned nonconformist household where he had been bred the only piece of great literature to be found was the Bible. And could his father have known that the boy was sucking honeyed wine of loveliness from the very altar vessels themselves, he would only have adjudged it to be one more proof of the malignancy of the ever-present evil which surrounds us here below.

Mrs. Knyvett stared in amazement. She recognised his devotion to Billy with all the clear sight which we are in the habit of showing when we recognise a fact that is useful. But she had no more supposed that he had deep hidden inner processes than if he had been a rabbit. Then she seized instinctively on the weakness of his answer.

"That's shirking the question," she exclaimed. "The exact words I used don't matter in the least. The point is just what I asked you a minute ago. Ought these two people to free themselves or not? When it's quite clear that everyone involved is deteriorating? Now, Peter, answer, and don't attempt to draw either the sun or the moon like a red herring across the trail."

Peter wriggled uneasily, pained once more at the freedom with which she handled tropes so hallowed. Yet he hedged again:

"But are they deteriorating really? Can anyone be sure of that? And when you say 'for the good of everybody concerned,' how can we be sure of what is really good for them?"

Mrs. Knyvett gazed at him with an ironical smile.

"You haven't been a preacher for nothing," she remarked; "you've breathed the miasma of sophistry that hangs about a pulpit. But I tell you—and you know it's true—that Billy isn't doing anything to justify all the milk he drank when he was a baby, nor all the energy that's been spent in educating him, nor all the wealth that has been poured out to make him what he is. I look at everything from the economic standpoint. The money that's been spent on making Billy a superfine article was taken from some other youth. Oh, yes, deny it as we may, it's true; so much poured out on the rich child means so much less for the poor one. And by the dreadfulness of that sum, so much the more stern is the call to pay back in service. And he isn't paying back. That's what cuts me to the heart."

Her lips tightened till she looked the image of one of her stern old forefathers who had hanged men from their ships' yard-arms for neglect of duty.

"Isn't he deteriorating?" she asked bitterly. "And Bellew? Well, I loathe the fellow, but he's going from bad to worse. And what about the girls he philanders after? Poor, paltry little things, of course, but isn't he robbing them every time of a bit of their womanliness? And it so happens that I've had put into my hands another thread. It leads, Peter, straight to the woman who really loves him, who might have made a man of him. Heavens! when I think of it all, I want to see the decree made absolute."

Mr. Westlake was silent; so, too, did he in that inner heart where, once in a way, we do occasionally look at things in their naked reality.

"But," said Mrs. Knyvett frankly, "I don't know that it will make much difference to Bellew. He started as a cur, and if he were the only person concerned, I shouldn't distress myself. But it's Billy—it's Billy."

She was walking up and down with hands loosely clasped behind her back.

"Don't you think," asked Peter gently, "that we're not looking at it rightly? After all, there are lots of men who can build the bridges he might be building, but perhaps out of these trials, these testing fires, is being made a finer man than we could ever make if we smoothed things for him?"

Mrs. Knyvett did not attempt to answer, for she was too wise not to know that he had laid his finger on the doubt which waits on all attempts to lighten the burden laid on the backs of men either by their own deeds, or by that "act of God" of which lawyers speak. She was aware, too, of her own weakness; knew that she liked to see tangible results of labour, preferred bridges to fresh ideas and good drains to great men.

With the cowardice of one who, weighing all things, yet cannot decide, she fell back on Sara. For what it looks like to her, she said shrewdly, is what will settle it all. Billy leaves it at that and there it must be left. But Mrs. Knyvett would have given a good deal to know whose fate would weigh the more heavily in Sara's reckoning—Archer's or her son's. She had a shrewd suspicion that Sara regarded Billy as candlestick rather than candle, as existing more for her own benefit than his own.

Then she dismissed Peter Westlake and sat down, as though at a game, to place out on the table all the actors in the puzzle. She actually used a set of ivory counters for the purpose and planned them out before her, as though she were an Ibsen visualising the scene of a play. By the time they had been arranged in a whimsical pattern she had soothed herself into the light and easy mood that was hers habitually, for the counters took the place of patience cards and the human problem became a diabolical "Miss Milligan."

Here, in the centre, she placed, not Sara, but Vin Hereford. He assumed in Mrs. Knyvett's inner eye the guise of an Eastern god with offspring issuing, by hermaphrodite birth, from his fruitful loins. Aloft he sat, a bronze creator making a world for his comfort. Then, like a ball swinging round him by a cord attached to his middle, flew Sara and Anne. Round Sara circled Billy and Bellew: round Anne, Peter Westlake. Like a Saturn's ring again round Bellew spun a cloud of girl witnesses, a milky way of waving hair and bright eyes. Minor bodies, cometary in nature, such as old Elizabeth, Pip Hawkins and his wife, with the Bodinars, came whirling from the stellar depths, drawn for a brief space within the attraction of this new Copernican system. Herself she had not placed, the omission struck her suddenly, and holding a forefinger above the counters, she plumped it quickly down and traced a circle with it—round her son. She was a satellite; Billy, a planet; Sara, a sun.

For a second the throe of a pain she had imagined to be dead long ago darted through her; all the love and care she had poured out had only worked to this end. Suddenly, disgusted with her foolish occupation, she swept her hand across the counters till they lay on the table like the dead on a battle-field. But none the less the image they had created remained in her mind.

"Now," said she to herself, "I shall go and call on the *primum-mobile* of the system, old Vin. For what I have to do is simply to get these people really into my head, to know their weak points and their strong."

Then it occurred to her that, with the fullest intention of keeping an open mind, she, too, was being sucked into the whirlpool that centred round those dilettante folk, the Herefords. More than that, like everyone else except humble Peter Westlake, she was, although a mere fly on the wheel, imagining herself to be the decisive element in the story.

She found Mr. Hereford in a great state of delight, for there had just reached him a piece of Japanese landscape after the school of Hokusai. Not only was he charmed with the picture itself but it had suggested to him an idea which he proceeded to develop to Mrs. Knyvett at great length. He was convinced that one of the reasons for the present unhealthy condition of the national nerves was that everyone neglected the macrocosm for the microcosm; people nowadays pored so intently over the internal world of their own minds that the outside world of lands and seas remained to them a *terra incognita.* Of course he assumed, without mentioning the fact, that people of his own sort made up the civilised world; sailors, travellers and the great mass of common workers were, in his eyes, of no more account than so many flies.

Except in the pages of Lafcadio Hearn, Mr. Hereford had never made the acquaintance of the Japanese, but now, with the phrase "the soul of a people" constantly on his lips, he discoursed in the style of a professor on the Art of the East. He belonged to that ever increasing class of people whose mental joys spring from the fluid, soporific influences of some vaguely apprehended place or time with which they can have no personal acquaintance. He would shiver like a fretful child at the hoar frost of an English winter, but revel in imaginative delight over the bleakness of the Polar ice; to him the burgesses of Dartmouth were mere vulgar cits, but the petty quarrels of some mediæval city caused him a thrill of genuine delight. Literally, Mr. Hereford's pleasure "never was at home"; what is to the ordinary man a mere relief from the apprehended monotony of his actual days had become to old Vi the regular occupation of his thoughts, for out of a mere luxury he had created a necessity.

Mrs. Knyvett wondered, as she sat listening to his rhapsodies on the sensations produced in him by this print, what would be the effect were she suddenly to show to him the curious web of circumstances at the heart of which he sat, the unconscious first cause of so many results. To Mrs. Knyvett, who rather overstated things in her love of picturesque speech, this old Sybarite appeared in the guise of a vulture feeding perpetually on a maiden, like that Caucasian bird who tore the liver of the rock-bound Prometheus.

She began to be afraid that none of the rest of the family were going to put in an appearance. Archer, it seemed, was in London, Anne had returned to her medical work and Sara was out. But Mrs. Knyvett was luckier than she had hoped, for in the midst of her preparations for leaving, Mrs. Bellew appeared, walking up the avenue with Mrs. Woodruffe and Molly.

The two dowagers received one another graciously and presently Mrs. Woodruffe settled down by Mrs. Knyvett, displaying as she did so a liberal allowance of openwork stocking and a highly-fluttered mind. She was taking in every detail of the newcomer's dress with the skill inherited from a family who for generations had used their finest powers of observation on that exercise of the brain.

"Very charmed to meet you," she exclaimed. "We know your son, you see, so very well that, really, Molly and I feel almost a part of the family."

"Indeed," riposted Mrs. Knyvett, "I was not aware that the acquaintance was so close as that. But I believe we have another link in young Anerley who is, my son tells me, a great friend of your daughter's."

"Oh, yes, he's quite a nice fellow. We were very glad to be kind to him, for I always think it does so much good to men of that class for them to meet refined women. You may not know it, perhaps, because she hasn't in the least the air of a blue-stocking, but my Molly took a first class degree. But I always tell her not to give herself airs on that account, for not even a degree can prevent a woman making a fool of herself. Study is very little trouble to her, or of course I should never have allowed her to go on with it. I always think there's nothing spoils the eyes so much as constant muzzing over books. And a young girl's looks, even in these days when they are all trying to ape the men, are the first consideration after all. 'Molly, my child,' I've said a hundred times if I've said it once, 'your mother started only with looks and see what she's done for herself.' Though of course I was always bright and versatile. Versatility has in fact been the curse of our family. Not but what Mr. Woodruffe was always a sad trial to me with his early death and constant chills. I don't think, Mrs. Knyvett, if you'll believe me, that I ever knew him without a cold in his head. It amounted in fact to chronic catarrh."

"Very sad," said Mrs. Knyvett, abstractedly watching Molly, who was looking tired and worn.

"And then he left me a widow so young. I remember that when I first appeared in weeds, they all said with one accord: 'Ah, a widow, indeed.' But it wasn't the width of the crape they referred to, it was the widow's heart. And you, too, Mrs. Knyvett, were early left, I understand?"

Mrs. Knyvett stared, for her mind had been wandering from the tepid flow of soothing contemplation which was Mrs. Woodruffe's idea of conversation. She repeated vaguely "Early left?" Then with an effort threw her mind back into the remote past.

"Oh, dear, yes," she said briskly, "he's dead these forty years. And, anyway, when he was alive he was almost always at sea, though not in the literal sense of course, since he was a barrister, so that he hardly seemed to count. If it wasn't for Billy's existence, I should hardly realise that I had ever been married. But I suppose I must have been, because I've always been quite respectable. Else I should call myself a sort of Virgin Martyr."

She sat up in her chair, as astringent as tannin and as stiff as buckram. Impishness lurked in the corner of her eye, for this babbling woman with the rat's teeth made her feel intensely irritable.

While Mrs. Woodruffe was trying to recover from this broadside of homeliness, Mrs. Knyvett was contriving to approach Molly. Insensibly the older woman's voice softened as she spoke to the girl, for she was always much influenced by the charm of youth and deep down, though she was unaware of the fact, one of her most instinctive objections to Sara was that she had the poise of a matured woman, was too self-sufficient to need mothering.

"Comes of a bad breed from that mincing little fifth-rate fool," she thought, "but she's a nice girl. And so she's to be sacrificed on the altar of British art, with Bellew for high priest, is she? *Nous verrons.*"

Mrs. Knyvett was getting into the spirit of the thing, but insensibly her anger was rising against Sara as she watched her cold self-possession while she dispensed hospitality to her guests and helped to keep her father pleased and in good humour. The self-possession was ostentatious, Mrs. Knyvett considered, in the midst of all this tohu-bohu that was going on round her. But whether hysterics would have pleased Mrs. Knyvett better is a moot point.

Meanwhile she had drawn Molly into the garden, for a quick liking had sprung up between these two, the girl divining the incipient motherliness of this lady of quality, and the woman feeling the instant response to her own on-coming disposition.

"You'll forgive me, my dear," said Mrs. Knyvett, gently touching the roses that the girl wore at her breast, "for speaking of your private affairs at so short an acquaintance. But I've heard all about it from Billy. We both like young Anerley very much indeed. He's just a bit young, perhaps," she added, covering many failings with the word, "but he will make a straightforward, honest man, to whom I would gladly give any girl I cared for. I suppose you two are about of an age in years, but a woman is always older than a man in many things. So I may speak frankly. Faults there are in him of manner, but there's a good heart underneath. You may do a great deal for him, my dear."

Nor, as Molly knew, did Mrs. Knyvett refer, as her son had done, to the mere matters of a successful career. Strange, too, that what she resented in Billy Knyvett, she liked when it came from his mother. But woman deals with woman on the homely every-day plane; with man she prefers to queen it. The noise of voices from the tea-table behind them, the circling of the gnats in the soft air, the lazy lap of the waves in the distance all combined to lure the girl into response to this quiet friendliness. She yielded to it as she might have to a warm, enveloping sea.

"Oh," she cried, "it isn't as easy as you think. People watch and say nothing and think the more. I feel like Mary Kingsley when she had a bath in West Africa, as though at every crevice there was glued an eye. Mother always makes things harder and my one friend down here has gone back to her work. Besides, I can't talk freely to Anne Hereford. For one thing, she's so straight, so down on the nail."

"Will you come to-night and dine with me on the yacht?" said Mrs. Knyvett. "I shall be quite alone, for Billy and Peter have to go up to town to see about stores for the expedition. They go by the night mail. And I have come down to see if I can be of any help. Let me begin with you. Not," said she, as she saw a shiver of withdrawal pass across the girl's face, "not that I want to press a confidence. I'm quite straight, I think, but I've seen many more things than Anne Hereford. Nor is it possible to shock me. Will you come? Cornelius is an admirable cook and Billy's Benedictine is quite the nicest I know. I always see to it that there's the genuine brand of it aboard the yacht, for Benedictine is a woman's liqueur, you know."

The girl closed her eyes and smiled. Already she felt around her a something to which in her hard life of struggle she had always been a stranger. It had seemed to her that every woman's hand was instinctively against her, every man's outstretched to snatch greedily at all she had to give. Through the whole of her home life this feeling ran; her fight for a living had only confirmed it; nor had her love affairs contradicted the notion, for Stephen cared for her as an adjunct to his career, Bellew because she could contribute to his pleasures. She paused a moment, startled at the idea of trusting an entire stranger who perhaps had her own ends to serve.

But Molly was a child before this woman at whom she looked so shyly. Then at last, like a field-mouse that greatly dares for a crumb, she put out a hand. It was firmly grasped and Mrs. Knyvett said:

"I know all about friendship, Molly. One of the best things in my life is my friendship with a woman whom you must know some day."

Mrs. Knyvett felt almost ashamed, with the generosity of a fine nature when it recognises how free from temptation it has always lived. She even envied for a moment those who, like Margaret Rossiter, like this girl, have waded through deep waters and so wading, have earned the firm ground on which they stand.

"Well," said Mrs. Woodruffe, as she walked home with her daughter, "of all the vulgar, ill-bred women I've ever had the misfortune to meet, commend me to this one. I actually blushed to hear the outrageously low things she said. She really is a perfect degradation to womanhood. But she seems to have taken a mighty fancy to you. I always notice that the people who take you up are the sort I really can't stand at any price. But it's all the same to me, of course. I'm nothing to them and they're nothing to me and I wouldn't say a word against your sticking to the nobs on any account, but how you can put up with the likes of that, really beats me."

Molly was for once entirely silent, since, as a matter of fact, she was herself regretting her expansive mood.

There was always one person at Craneham whom Mrs. Knyvett insisted on seeing and that was Elizabeth, formerly of the Latin Quarter. Mrs. Knyvett was, next to *la petite* Anne, the one person with whom Elizabeth put off her official manner. Bidding good-bye to Mr.

Hereford, who was already nodding in his chair after the fatigue of his lecture on Eastern Art, Mrs. Knyvett made for the back regions of the house.

Weird sounds came from the kitchen; the lashing of tails was followed by hard thumps on the flags of the floor and the noise of laughter. Mrs. Knyvett opened the door and there found the immaculate Sara unbending for once. She was sitting on the floor, in fact, holding her knees with her hands while the two cats practised jiujutsu with one another. Boulou and Baby, standing rampant on hind legs, gripped each other, were thrown, and lay kicking stomachs with a volley of thumps. Tails lashed, and Sara spurred them on. Watching in her corner sat Elizabeth.

Then the cats withdrew, ears back, staring at one another with wild green eyes. Lack of wind called Time. Attracted by Elizabeth's glance, Sara turned round and found Mrs. Knyvett watching her.

"Isn't it lovely?" she cried. "Do come and look at them."

Then, holding the seal-coloured beast up to her face till its furry cheeks were close to hers:

"Ingie—pingie—wingie," she chuckled, raining kisses on the creature's flat head, while it kicked her with lively be-stockinged hind legs.

Mrs. Knyvett sank into a chair with a sigh of pleasure, for the place was warm and homely and although she disapproved of Sara at a distance, she yet found her not ill at close quarters. Elizabeth was gazing at the scene like a sphinx. Every now and then her lips worked; she might, to all appearance, have been telling her beads, had it been possible to conceive the old Parisian doing anything so mediæval.

Then, suddenly tiring of the cats, Sara pushed them aside.

"What do you think of Archer's last book?" she asked abruptly, as she sat on her heels looking up at Mrs. Knyvett. "For of course you've read 'Between Two Servitudes'?"

"Oh, yes," answered Mrs. Knyvett, for the first time wondering whether she had ever really come in contact with the true Sara. This was a woman, keen-eyed, with brain evidently working. The episode of the cats, too, had been proof of a childish unbending that she had never associated with this cold, self-contained woman. Then, catching a glimpse of Elizabeth's smiling eyes, she understood; this old kitchen was Sara's home.

"It appears to me," remarked Mrs. Bellew, "that it's the most sincere thing he's yet done. Oh, yes," she smiled, noticing Mrs. Knyvett's look of surprise, "I can be fair, I think, even to my own husband's work. It's full, of course, of the clatter of broken commandments, but then the old decalogue nowadays is just like an old chart—no use in unexplored seas."

"And the seas of to-day are all unexplored."

"Yes, yes, yes," exclaimed Sara eagerly, "that's it; that's just it. Archer is helping to work at the great task of the time, the recognition that all sorts of new social groupings are required to suit the people of to-day. We've never been so bent on being ourselves, you know, as we are nowadays."

"Yet," said Mrs. Knyvett, "at the same time, looking at us in one way you would say that we were all being drilled into a set of well-behaved, under-vitalised nonentities, all turned out after the same pattern, all worshipping the same gods. It seems sometimes as if civilisation were a hydra, coiling round and stifling the power out of us."

She bent forward eagerly, as keen for the encounter of wits as though she had not been already talking for hours on end. A day's silence would have brought Mrs. Knyvett to lockjaw.

"That's true, that's true," cried Sara, "but we're trying to escape. We *must* escape if we're to live. That's why Archer and his like are useful."

"Ay," said Mrs. Knyvett grimly, "they show you how to break the commandments gracefully."

"And why not? Some people have got to smash commandments. It's the only way they can help. For we are 'Between two Servitudes,' that of the past and the future. We must serve one or the other."

"Then I put my money on the future," said Mrs. Knyvett.

"And so do I," answered Sara, rising.

They both stood in silence by the stove in whose red-hot belly glowed the fire that was presently to cook Mr. Hereford a dainty dinner. The stove became in the eyes of these women a sort of symbol of that past which worked in the lives of all three.

"You see," said Sara dreamily, "we're only now beginning to know the truth about women. All down the centuries men have told us what they wanted us to be. And so we pretended to be it, to please them. They've never seen us as we are. We've been like slaves, disguising ourselves to please our masters, hiding our ideas under folly, like Mrs. Woodruffe when she's on the war path. We're strong enough now to let the truth be known. That's where Archer comes in; he is a specialist in women. But, you know," she laughed, "he really is a very conventional person in actual life. Talks all sorts of stuff that comes down from duelling days about not doing this, that, or the other when he's a guest, or a host, or something of that sort. There's a kind of Byronism about him, too, that attracts girls like Molly Woodruffe."

Mrs. Knyvett felt as though she were watching a dainty lady in kid gloves suddenly start dissecting a corpse.

"While Archer was talking, Billy would take a convention in his hands and smash it to atoms, if he thought the time was come to do it," said Sara.

"He waits, sits quiet, and then—" said Mrs. Knyvett.

"Ups," exclaimed Elizabeth, breaking in on the conversation at the point where she could follow it.

The three women understood one another very well when it came to the comprehension of the heart. Then swift duty fell upon Sara and she fled from the room to see how her father was faring.

"*Ah, oui*, Madame," said Elizabeth, coming over to Mrs. Knyvett and leaning with one hand on the spotless white deal table, "I am glad you have come. For to *ce cher* M. Knyvett one cannot speak freely as to one of one's own sex. And Madame is of those who understand."

None but Elizabeth's hands were ever supposed to touch so much as a *bain-Marie* in the preparation of dinner and when the hour of meal-time approached no maid dared to come near Elizabeth's kitchen. Hence they need fear no interruption; yet the old woman took at least three minutes in carefully turning Boulou and Baby out of doors and in investigating the passages beyond which, in their own quarters, the two maids could be heard laughing and talking.

Although Elizabeth knew everything that went on in Cranecham, she used her knowledge so shrewdly that none suspected it. Partly on account of her nationality and partly because of her personal attachment to Sara, she stood as a link between maids and mistress. Her knowledge of English, too, was far greater than she allowed anyone to imagine, therefore everyone talked freely before her, even going so far as to regard her, to Elizabeth's own secret joy, as a cross between an inspired idiot and a deaf mute. Nor did she ever make mischief, but even at times showed a sort of Gascon jollity, acid and sharp, as befitted her age, but real and hearty enough to induce confidence in most women. See her stand in the middle of the kitchen and strip her withered arm to show its muscle or boldly draw her skirts round her legs to indicate the brave Belgian stoutness thereof and you would understand in a twinkling why no one bottled himself up before Elizabeth. By these means she knew everything, much as the old broad earth knows the little peccadilloes of the beasts that crawl on her.

Although she loved Sara, she none the less enjoyed the drama of the story she had to tell. Nor were her preparations yet complete, for, jumping to her feet with such alacrity as her eighty odd years allowed her, she opened the clock face over the mantelpiece and tranquilly put the hands back half an hour.

"'Twill take as much as that," she observed, "and if there's trouble about the time of the dinner! Bah! the clock cannot lie, can it? I have my witness, I."

She winked and seated herself.

"I know not," said she, placidly resting her hands on her lap, "what Madame, who hath endured it, may think of marriage, but for my part, who am but a maiden yet, I think there should be a certain decency about it."

To so evident a proposition Mrs. Knyvett assented fully.

"*Eh bien,*" continued Elizabeth, "I say not, since the messieurs are what they are, that there might not be one, two, perhaps three, little establishments for each monsieur, given the means, of course. One perhaps a little milliner, another a lady of the *coulisses*, a yellow-haired one, *vous savez.* These things are so in my country, as in yours. *N'importe!* It is so. The messieurs have their ways and, *bon Dieu,* it is after all a great saving of harassment to a wife. Many a wise woman thinks like that. I have known those who do, women who sat not down to say, like *les petits,* I will have things all to my mind. They know that cannot be, so they say: '*Voilà!* here is this man of mine. *Au fond,* he is a beast. But it is better not to think of it. It is better to turn the back on it.' And, in this way, that husband he gives a woman what she wants, because she wants not the things she cannot get."

"True philosophy, indeed, Elizabeth. But how much better not to have anything to do with him."

"Eh, but woman is woman, too. And it is the only way, for the hand of *le bon Dieu* shook badly when he took the clay in hand to make the messieurs. He had more—what you call practice—when he come to *Us.* We are more pairfect. But it is not managed as I have said in this house. For M. Bellew he pack not away his *petites dames* in this corner, that corner, like the little mice in their holes. No, down here he comes, *par ici,* and he make the town talk, ay, the *canaille* jabber. And the little Mademoiselle they talk of come here, here, to Madame Sara's own house. She was here to-day with that"—here Elizabeth recurred to an ancient Southern sign—"her mother. It is not *comme-il-faut.*"

"Elizabeth!" exclaimed Mrs. Knyvett sharply, "surely they are not talked of so. You are romancing. Your fears make you see bogies."

"*Écoutez!* Madame. This is how it start. They have over in that town where, phew! it stinks of fish, they have many devils, it seems, and ways of dealing with them that tell what is coming, that tell the future? How? Eh, by the cards, by looking in the well. Who knows? The peasants in my country do the same. Now to one of these devil-owners goeth the little Mademoiselle. Ay, a cunning one is that devil-owner. She know everything, all the gossip, and so she talk of nozzing but M. Bellew. And she note that the Mademoiselle she hath ears for nothing but for ce M. Bellew. Not once, but twice, hath *la petite* gone there, to the house of this Madame Bo-de-na, the devil-owner. And now that same Madame Bo-de-na hath gold. She shut up her house and go; she send her children away. She hath gold; she go; presently Mademoiselle go, too, they say.

"Now, Madame, they put, what you call it?—two by two——"

"Lying jades," cried Mrs. Knyvett.

"Eh! what will you? They stand hands on waist, I know them, these Englishwomen, and talk! talk! talk! And look at the mad locks of these brutes of Anglaises. Ah! but they want the beautiful coiffures of my countrywomen!"

"Do, for heaven's sake, go on with your story. And so these fools, seeing that Mrs. Bodinar has money, say——"

"That M. Bellew has paid her; that at her house he hath assignations with Mademoiselle. That Madame Bodena is——"

"No need to name it, Elizabeth! Thank goodness I came down. But it is all Billy's fault. Now, listen, Elizabeth. All this is a great farrago of lies. I know all about the Bodinars and her having money has nothing at all to do with Mr. Bellew. Bodinar, the man, ran away from his wife and my son is arranging to bring them together again. For that purpose he gave Mrs. Bodinar a little money to settle up her affairs."

"*Voilà!* but the tongues of the women over here are worse than the devils of the place. Now in my country they love good things. They sing gaiement: *Vive le vin, vive l'amour*. But they sit not in dark holes, like these Anglaises, recounting to one another monstrous fables."

"Six to one and half a dozen to the other," snapped Mrs. Knyvett. "But really this is preposterous. And do they say anything about my son?"

"Eh! they say," shrugged Elizabeth, "that he is *épris* with Madame Sara and it is time that Madame gave herself a little comfort."

"Perhaps they say that Madame has done so?" enquired Mrs. Knyvett, eyeing the old woman keenly.

"Ah, no! he is cold, M. Knyvett. He would not lift his eyes to so great a height."

"And that isn't true, Elizabeth. You needn't tell any lies to me. I suppose they *do* say so."

"*En effet*," said Elizabeth calmly, "Madame Sara and M. Billee were made for one another. When *le bon Dieu* framed them both, he held them up, one in each hand, and said: '*Voilà! mes enfants*, two halves of a pairfect whole. And don't you forget it.' But they mislaid one another. That's where the mischief began. *N'est-ce pas*, Madame?"

But Madame was too harassed to reply. Nor did she recover her equanimity till, with a well-blended little dinner in her interior, she sat in the *Pendragon's* saloon tête-à-tête with Molly Woodruffe. Elizabeth's story had done harm, for Mrs. Knyvett's feeling towards the girl had changed; she no longer felt in the same mood of beneficent kindness towards her. For, although she knew that the story bruited abroad by Rumour was nothing but a lie, she could not acquit Molly of a folly so careless that it amounted to criminality. Nor did the fact that her son was indirectly concerned, through the money he had advanced to Mrs. Bodinar, tend to make Mrs. Knyvett any the more generous towards the girl.

Then, as she watched the oily flow of the Benedictine which Cornelius was pouring for them, the devil entered into Mrs. Knyvett. It suddenly struck her how easily solved this problem would be were she just to give Molly a little push onwards, over the abyss that is called the irrevocable. There was the way out of it all, a way that left Billy with untarnished honour, that set Sara free only at the cost of some vexation. Bellew would marry the girl most certainly; she herself, the fly on the wheel, as she called herself, would see to that. The suit for restitution that Margaret Rossiter had talked of, would end all and send Billy back, free from all these ludicrous, degrading entanglements, to do his work in the world. At whose cost?

Mrs. Knyvett looked across the table at the delicate bare head and shoulders in the light of the bulkhead lamps, as Molly blew smoke rings from her round button of a mouth; a very dainty thing, even to the earrings clasped to her ears, the harem-toys that Mrs. Knyvett hated. There was a diamond in each and they winked at the masterful person who watched them. Mrs. Knyvett began to feel like a divine artificer who holds on the palm of his hand the tiny mortals that revolve in their figure dance beneath his brooding eyes. A breath, just a sudden sigh from above, and this little figure before her might be puffed right over into the abyss.

Or so it seemed.

"I used to think," said Molly, "that it didn't matter what became of me. For you see I've always felt as a pig would feel, if it knew it was being fed for pork. Mother's run me like a race-horse for the matrimonial stakes ever since I was so high. I've been dragged round to hydros and boarding-houses and she's given parties for me, always telling me the cost afterwards. Oh, I needn't mind telling you, for everybody else would, if I didn't. And after every outburst we have to live as meanly as church mice. Of course we starve our servants and they hardly ever stay outside their month. I've escaped, in a way, but the fact is I drop back and get tired of the everlasting grind. Then I read things like 'The Odd Women,' and 'The Old Wives' Tale,' and I saw *Justice*. The people there were trivial and weak, worse than I am, in fact, but they seemed to matter, all the same. For they felt, suffered, lived in their own world, just as I do. They wanted to be happy, just as I do, and they had even worse times than I had. Then I knew that I was one of a big number and we all of us mattered. That's how it was."

Mrs. Knyvett was answered; not entirely convinced by the logic of Molly's deduction, she yet recognised its premises. For she was old enough to be able to remark the change that has passed over English life during the last half century while the alchemists of literature, its realistic novelists and playwrights, have been at work. In this age both mean streets, respectable stucco-villas and brick-built rows of artisans' dwellings have been made to yield right human stuff, just as the slag heaps of the mines have had to give up their treasures to the chemist. No one nowadays, as Mrs. Knyvett began to see, is a great artificer, where all are wonderful in as much as they suffer. Of the suffering, indeed, too much has been made. Yet this was inevitable since the painters of it are themselves of the most sensitive class that nature makes. They heighten the pains, therefore, and often suppress the secret place of hidden pleasure which most human beings conceal within themselves, visiting it daily as a boy his hoard of ripening apples.

Of the realities of their life most people can say nothing, but the dumb have found a voice to-day in the teller of stories. Not unwisely, then, did old Philip Hawkins pay homage to the father of the English novel, that Bow Street magistrate with his scheme for the reformation of the still, unreformed English Poor Law, and both, more precious still, his imaginative sympathy that went down into the stews of London with seeing eye and recording hand.

"And then," continued Molly, "there was Anne Hereford and, oh, dozens of women like her that I've known. They made me feel how hateful it was to do anything to make women despised more than they are already. They say women betray secrets, that they aren't to be trusted. Well! the other day a woman secretary that I know sold some political information because she wanted, just for once, a five-guinea hat from Bond Street. She'd always been badly paid—we nearly all are, you know. And every man who knew of it said: 'Oh, a woman again, you see. Can't trust 'em.' So she pushed all women back a little more, just so far as her influence reached. I should hate myself if I'd done a thing like that!" she exclaimed, pleating the fringe of the table-cloth.

Mrs. Knyvett was modern enough to understand the spirit of sex loyalty that flows like a river through the woman's life to-day, a subterranean river that only flashes in the daylight here and there.

"But yet," said Molly, with thorough enjoyment of this outpouring of her inner world, "I don't want to settle, as people call it. It's so horribly final."

She wriggled, as though an earwig had slipped down her back.

Mrs. Knyvett smiled, for she, too, was thoroughly enjoying her excursion into the girl's mind.

"And Stephen Anerley," she said, "would build you so firmly into his life, wouldn't he? Master Stephen is a man who always knows his own mind. Faith, and he ought to, for he sweeps out the corners of it as religiously as he takes a bath. Do you. know, the other day I was reading a discourse on what the author was pleased to call 'morals.' He took as his text some Japanese rules about washing and eating and talked as if they constituted a moral code. He really didn't seem to see that there are deeper things in morality than baths and flesh-eating. As to sex morality, he summed it up by 'Marry early and marry often.' Stephen's just like that man. He doesn't bother about any thunder from Sinai—or the Pit—directing where he's to walk. He just hears the doctor saying: 'Now, Mr. Anerley, three square meals a day, eight hours' sleep and a hot bath. Blood-hot, you understand.'"

"And the 'marry early and often'?" asked Molly, showing her dimples.

"Yes, that too. Marriage is to him just a healthy practice, as it is with the Japanese, not a thing that concerns soul and spirit," said Mrs. Knyvett.

The next moment she suddenly bethought herself of the impropriety of such talk about a man to his own fiancée.

"Ye gods!" ejaculated she mentally. "Why ever do I attempt to talk to anybody under forty? I'm not *virginibus puerisque*, and that's a fact."

Molly covered her confusion by lighting a fresh cigarette; the ease with which men keep silence over the mysteries is, it would seem, not temperamental, but a mere result of the tobacco habit. Had Mrs. Knyvett's mouth but held a pipe, her tongue, mayhap, would have kept holy silence. Instead, being irritated with herself, she plunged recklessly.

"And 'marry early and often' is right enough, too, for a man. One wife's not enough for any man. And when a woman's got her children, she doesn't want to be bothered with him. It's bad for the children, possible and actual, and it's bad for her. Monogamy's one of the causes why we're generating so many nervous children, of course."

One of the methods practised in medicine is that of arousing an organ to the performance of its function by means of irritation. On this principle Molly's puritanism was aroused. She sat up and glared, awake at last to her own maidenliness.

"Mrs. Knyvett," she exclaimed, "how can you talk like that? There isn't anything in the world so wonderful as the love between one man and one woman, just those two, with all the world outside as nothing to them. Why, all the best, the finest things in life come from that. And if it means pain and struggle to live up to such a high ideal, aren't we all the better for the fight?"

"Then, my dear, if that's what you think," said Mrs. Knyvett quietly, "why in the world are you philandering about with Archer Bellew, and losing your good name into the bargain?"

She proceeded to tell Elizabeth's story in very plain.

words, while Molly sat and shivered as though she had been whipped.

"Do you care for Anerley ?" asked Mrs. Knyvett, when she had finished.

"Yes, but——"

"But you like the sort of Byronism that Bellew affects. I shouldn't wonder if he'd given you that ring," she said, pointing to a bloodstone on the girl's finger. "And you're to send to him with it, if you want his help ?"

A second flush across the girl's white face showed that the shot had gone home.

"I know two other women with whom he has a similar arrangement," said Mrs. Knyvett dryly. "Forbye, he's got a wife. Now, if you're shocked at my physiology, good, plain, honest fact as it is, I'm shocked at your falseness to your own principles. I've heard that you've a good head when you like to use it, that you can speak and organise. Go away and do it, then. Send back Bellew his ring with the message that you've no more use for it. And go off to your work. If at the end of a year or so, you and Anerley are of the same mind, and you care for the prospect of writing his speeches and bearing his children, then marry him. If not, don't. Plenty of other fish in the sea. But don't try to catch 'em with hook and line, for that spoils the fish, my dear. There, now, there," she cried, seeing that Molly was gasping from this douche of words. "I'm not as hard or as wicked as I seem. You don't really care for this Bellew, do you ?"

Molly was silent for a moment. Then she said :

"He played with me, led me on. Then—pushed me away. He said nothing was so good as anticipation." Then lower still, "He shamed me."

Mrs. Knyvett drew the girl's head down on her shoulder ; she had got the truth at last.

"Little girl," she said ; "poor little girl. But never mind what other people say, or think. It isn't what they think that matters to you. If it seems right to you to—go on with this man, then do it. But does it seem honest to you yourself ?"

"No," said Molly, "it doesn't. It never would, really. I've always known that. I suppose it was he who was —honest."

"The cur!" said Mrs. Knyvett heartily. "But don't forget the proverb, for your own comfort: 'Sins of the flesh are not sins.' Sins of the spirit are much worse, I think. But you'll go back to a good healthy job now, won't you, that means eight hours a day of hard labour and as much political excitement as you can get in?"

"Yes," said Molly, as lifting her head from its resting place, she contemplated Mrs. Knyvett's powerful face. "You're not hard, really," she remarked at last.

After her visitor had gone, Mrs. Knyvett sat on till Cornelius began to wonder if he would ever see his bunk again. She was thinking with joy of the good, healthy wind, snow, rain, sleet, and ice of the Horn. The grey-beards thereof delighted her, nor did its inky cap of sullen cloud strike terror to her heart. For there Billy would be far removed from this fluttering of cage-birds.

She was, besides, very pleased with herself, since she had attempted no diabolic meddling with Molly Woodruffe's fate, but had rather played the part of light-bringer. Altogether she had earned the sleep of the just; so, too, had Cornelius by the time she called him to put out the lights.

CHAPTER XI

ARGONAUTS OF A PHANTOM FLEECE: IN THIS SIMON BODINAR SINGES HIS WINGS AND THE REST OF THE COMPANY SUFFER A SEA CHANGE

"WHAT the hell! cried Mr. Cole and propped himself on his elbow the better to listen. With a long glide downwards into the trough of the sea, a shiver and an upward rebound to the crest, the floor of the *Pendragon* slanted nimbly, alive to the cradling of the blue water. It was not the ship's motion that had roused the mate nor was it the clattering of the gimbal that fastened the lamp to the cabin bulkhead. To these things Mr. Cole was accustomed.

"Rra—Rra—Rra," sounded the horn overhead; then came a patter of feet, an order in Knyvett's tones and the answer from the man at the wheel.

"Fog," said the first mate, "and the Old Man on deck."

Nor was it *that* which had penetrated to his brain through the mists of sleep; it was a sound in the cabin itself, a sound which annoyed Mr. Cole even at the moment when he was rejoicing in the second mate's inferiority as a seaman. Of course the skipper had to sleep "all standing" since Lethbridge was at the port watch and a fog going on at the edge of soundings.

Then the noise came again: a rattling of top teeth against bottom from the opposite bunk where slept the carefully cherished object of everyone's attention aboard—Simon Bodinar, the gold-finder. He was talking in his sleep with the noise a cat makes when she sees a bird in the blue. Every ounce of sleep gone from him, Cole listened, his hairy ears a-quiver and his steel blue eyes as keen as a ferret's. For, as though he were a toad who may, perchance, bear a jewel in his head, the crew watched the red-haired seaman; to them the working of his brain was a thing to bet about, and the care of his person a charge precious as that of royalty. Cole, as the first in authority, had been entrusted with the duty of bear-leader; hence the two were roommates, for the gold thirst, like poverty, makes strange bedfellows.

"The wages of sin—is death," said Bodinar, lisping like an old man who has forgotten his false teeth.

"'Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth?

"'Are thy days as the days of man? Are thy years as man's days?

"'That thou enquirest after mine iniquity——'

"See Book of Job, chapter ten, verse——"

His last words came with the sucking sound of a pump that is running dry.

"Ah," said Cole, "I knowed we was looking for trouble with thiccy aboard."

He saw how, in the darkness, the man's lips were groping after words. Then, irritated at the loss of his sleep, he felt for a light, his eyelids swollen, his chin sprouting with hair as grey as a badger's. Though first mate on a gentleman's yacht, he was a fierce man of the people and never said "Sir" to anybody without a truculent wink of his eye the next minute. Bodinar he detested, as he detested everything he could not fathom.

"Asleep, or seems so," he said, flashing a light gently across the sleeper's eyes. Then sitting on the edge of his own bunk, he began to yawn in cavernous noisy spells.

"The soul—that sinneth—it shall die," said Bodinar so loudly that the mate jumped.

"Oh, dry up," returned Cole, all agog, however, for more explicit information.

"Is he?" he exclaimed, "is he?" and crossed the cabin once more to stare at Bodinar. The glow of the match made an arc of flame in the darkness and sputtered out. The air of the cabin was heavy and stifling.

Whenever anything queer happened in connection with Bodinar, Mr. Cole rejoiced that he had wasted no money on the venture up Smyth's Channel. He felt more certain than ever of his wisdom when he saw Mrs. Bodinar come aboard, since, in his opinion, she was "no cop." Mrs. Cole knew the woman and Mrs. Cole could be trusted to know what was what, for not even the birth of twins could distract her from her life-work, that of cleaning her house from top to bottom and again from bottom to top. At present the Coles paid £25 a year in rent, nor grudged it, though their promised land was a house on the cliff with a flag-staff and a front garden, the style of residence that is built by a merchant skipper retiring on the profits of the slop chest. A pair who had such ambitions alternately envied the ill-gotten gains and despised the slovenly home of a woman like Bessie Bodinar. To have her aboard was like carrying a fire in the hold. Ladies on a yacht were, like weevils or rats, in the order of the day, but women—"Good Lord!"

When the muttering began again, Cole flung a sea-boot across the cabin, lay down once more and closed his ears to all interruptions, for it was the fifth bell in the first watch and the second watch was his.

"Tipping her rubbish into the hold, that's what the

Old Man's mamma was about when she sent that woman aboard," thought the mate.

Nor was he far wrong, for it was Mrs. Knyvett who had insisted on the shipment of Bodinar's wife. In her opinion the kettle of fish which she called *l'affaire Hereford* was quite needlessly complicated by the presence of such an unsavoury ingredient as Bessie Bodinar. Like a housewife on the eve of a spring clean, Billy's mother had not only banished all lumbering furniture, but had pushed on the preparations that were to sweep as many men as possible from the scene of action.

She it was who lined the saloon bulkheads with charts, who talked perpetually of Yahgans, of Alaculofs, of the navigation of the First Narrows, and the tides off Cape Virgins, blowing Southward Ho! with the persistence of a trade wind. She fired Peter, she caused Uncle Pip Hawkins to glow like a furnace, she even relaxed the lines on Billy's face, for he saw through her motives and grinned. Yet she won, for it was owing to her exertions that on the last day of June the *Pendragon* hoisted the Blue Peter and slipped down the fairway of the Dart like a merchant adventurer of long ago.

The stores were dispatched by cargo boat from Glasgow in charge of an assayer who would join them at Punta Arenas. Slung between the masts of the liner was the ten-ton steam tug that was to convey them up the winding reaches of Smyth's Channel. It was Uncle Pip who dispatched this convoy; to his mind, the Fortnum and Mason's stores should have been salt junk and rum, but he bore with these piping times of armchair comforts and regarded with a kindling eye and a mouth that whistled free the tents, the Marine glue, the timber balks, the mercury washer and spades. It was the spades that attracted the curiosity of the second mate of the liner:

"Shooting expedition," said Uncle Pip to him blandly.

"Ay," said the mate with a twinkle, "ye'll do well, shooting wi' spades. It's the newest fashion by what they tell me."

Then he began marvellous yarns of "Sloggett Bay gold," where the prospectors threw away more money than they took out, for he knew the Magellan Straits well. But he also told of a Punta Arenas man who regularly disappeared every year up the Straits and returned with enough gold to keep him for twelve months.

The air round Uncle Pip was already ringing with the noise of "Pieces of eight" when in the yellow dawn of a dirty morning he watched the liner slip her moorings for the leagues of sea beyond. Snuffing the wind, which smelt of chimney reek, he savoured the sea-tang and went home to set up a chart-room where daily he traced the red line that followed the supposed route of the *Pendragon* past the Canaries, across the Line, along the Brazil coast, to the west of the Falklands, and so on to the kelp of the Magellan Straits, those straits which Pedro Sarmiento entered by Cape Pillar, vowing as he did so a present of wax to the holy house of Our Lady of Guadalupe and christening them "the Straits of the Mother of God" with fine old heroic faith, "in the name of the most Holy Truth, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three Persons and one only true God Almighty who created heaven and earth out of nothing, in whom I believe, and in whom all true Christians ought to believe firmly; and of the most holy, ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God, our advocate, and more especially the advocate of this fleet."

At the noise made by the changing of the watch, Peter Westlake awoke and going to the door of his cabin, stood looking out; he was uneasy, restless, dissatisfied, for he knew that steadily and imperceptibly, a web of suspicion and distrust was being woven round this company of adventurers. For the "who is on my side, who?" that challenge which each man sends out when he finds himself in strange company, had been answered by the formation of a ring of watchers round Bodinar. Only Billy remained unchanged; his judgment in suspension, he kept the man as far as possible in the saloon, often playing cards with him, for Bodinar played euchre as well as though he hailed from California. But this line of Knyvett's only produced a fresh combination of elements, for the ring of watchers began to adopt an attitude of armed neutrality towards the skipper himself.

Then a green sea broke on deck and Cole, turning back from the companion-stair, came down to Peter. His oilskins were a comfort in the foggy place.

"He's been a-talking in his sleep, or making out to," whispered he.

Neither needed more than the pronoun to indicate their man. Peter had the queer idea that they were both like the gulls that tear a wounded mate to bits, rather for hatred of the strange, the unusual, than from mere lust of meat.

"And he's got brandy, I'll swear. If Cornelius has been got at, I'll wring his neck for him." With that he turned on his heel.

Westlake stayed where he was, for he was afraid to move; he had gone back countless ages, to a time when behind the noises of the dark lay the unknown Dread. Big, shapeless things were around him in the rustling, the sucking, the baffling of the wind and tide. He stood with head bent and shoulders humped. This vessel once a "Holy Joe" had got the memory of the ice-blink, of the muffled beatings of the milky sea in it. He had in his cabin certain sheets of an ancient note-book kept by the former chaplain. It made queer reading with its mixture of Puritan precision and wild sea days.

All the while Westlake was furiously angry with himself; for years he had looked forward to this voyage that was to have been the time of his life. And he was wasting it in foolery like this! He was like a man who, embracing a fair soft mistress, found her turned into a gorgon.

Cheeks flaming, heart thumping, with an effort he moved and flung open the door of Cole's cabin.

Bodinar was rummaging in his sea-chest, his arms plunged to the armpits in a welter of clothes. With a start he withdrew them and sat on his heels looking up. Both men were startled at each other, but both men were a thousand times more comfortable than they had been when alone. On a table stood a half empty glass and the place smelt of brandy.

He was only pretending to be asleep, thought Peter, and registered another point to be communicated to Cole.

"Bodinar," said Peter, suddenly resolute, as he watched the rise and fall of the shaggy fell of hair on the man's half-bare breast, "what the deuce is the matter with you? Here's Cole says you've been talking in your sleep, and——"

He glanced at the glass on the table.

"And," said Bodinar, as recovering himself and his temper, he lifted the glass to his lips and drained it to the last drop, "here's to all the spying, chattering, key-hole watching crew of this here durned rat-trap."

Laughing at the change in the man, Peter drew back; he felt as cheery now as the man who has lit a crackling fire.

"So the mate heard me, did he?" went on Bodinar. "Well, let 'en and if they never sight the gold, they'll have but themselves to thank for it. For I tell you plainly, sir, all this spying fairly sets my head in a maze. And I see things, things I don't like."

He put a hand to his forehead and swayed to a seat, his brain whirling with drink and some interior vision.

"Bodinar," persisted Peter, "do you believe in this gold yourself? or are you terrified at finding that you bit off more than you could chew that night when you told us the yarn? For if it was a lie, then you're in the wrong box, my friend."

"Lie? Who says it was a lie? There I showed you the pay-dirt. Hadn't I got it? And I showed you where it come from. What more do you want than that? Gold, beyond the dreams of avarice," said he sleepily. "Mineral wealth, all up the Straits."

He produced a screw of paper and unrolling it, tossed out on the table a little heap of copper ore. A book slipped off the man's bunk and Peter Westlake, picking it up, held it in his hands for a moment. It was a sixpenny translation of "La Dame aux Camélias." Seeing it in his hand, Bodinar changed his tone, for he had begun life as a Methodist.

"It's a queer book that," said he. "I didn't know what sort of a thing it was when I got it. There's rum things in that book;" he blinked at Peter with a libidinous eye. "I'm all for Miss Braddon," added he piously.

Peter nodded, for he knew the South Sea Bible.

"You mustn't judge me by the books I read," said the man, no longer complacent. He was quickly dissolving into self-pity, his eyelids quivered, his arms dropped at his sides. Peter went out hastily and closed the door behind him, for he had no wish to see any more. He was again vexed at the way the human element was getting between him and that gift on which he had counted, the fine freedom of the sea.

The phrase seemed a mockery as he stood on the deck next morning watching the *Pendragon* in the fog that cut the tops of the masts off waist high and shrouded everything above it in a blanket of dirty dun colour. The voice was stifled as in cotton wool and the decks were wet with the mists that crept across the face. The eye in vain tried to pierce the dark wall of the unknown that hemmed it in on every side; in the effort to plumb the mist the fancy created cavernous yawning depths that opened, to show the fog breaking on towering steamer sides. Only the sickly yellow of the binnacle lamp became more luminous as the daylight broadened. Only the eyes found rest in watching the fibrous grip of the helmsman, an old seaman, scarred and twisted like a gnarled tree, with ingrowing finger nails blackened with grime. The deft agility of these crippled hands made the mind feel less helpless against this strange power of nature that binds and holds, that blinds and deafens. Old Maintop's trick at the wheel was a comfort, for the stillness was as oppressive as are long days of solitude. The mind was forced back on itself; it fed on its own substance and the hours of the watch seemed endless, for the silence of the stars is less lonesome than a fog-encircled world where the mind dreads what the eye cannot see.

Then Knyvett stepped up to the steering gear and Westlake watched him as he stood gulping down the coffee Cornelius had brought. He had been on deck all night, conning the ship like a goal-keeper who watches the whole game for the sake of a minute's quick resourcefulness. Plainly, too, he had enjoyed himself; his movements were quick, alert; his eyes bright and keen, for all the strain round them. Peter heard afterwards of the steamer that had for an instant split the curtain of fog, of the quick orders, of the churning of the waters as the yacht parted company with her.

The two men looked aloft; faintly one yard-arm peeped and then another; monstrous far above they seemed. Then a canvas showed for a second and they could perceive currents in the fog that the next moment closed overhead like a huge bat.

"Wind's freshening," said Knyvett; "we shall be out of it in an hour."

In less than ten minutes there was the ripple of a catspaw on the water ahead, the first sight of sea for all that morning. Then catspaws every way and finally the gleam of sun that makes the eyes smart. It was as good as a fair landfall.

With a yawn and a stretch Knyvett went below.

"Yes, it's been a bit thick," said Cole to Peter, later on, "but about that Bodinar now?"

The decks were a-wash, for the ship's toilet was toward.

"Damn the man," said Peter.

They kept Mrs. Bodinar under hatches, so to say, in those days, for fear her husband should catch sight of a flirt of skirts round a doorway. Every man-jack aboard, in fact, was occupying his spare moments with Rabelaisian visions of the first meeting between this red-bearded Ulysses and his Penelope. Billy Knyvett was much exercised to end this game of hide and seek, but Mrs. Bodinar dreaded, like most women, the decisive cast of the dice. To live in a bliss dim-descried she much preferred to a feverish plunge into possible misery.

Bodinar was close on her tracks half a score of times at least. Once, for instance, when she was engaged in tidying the first mate's cabin only a call from deck prevented Bodinar from coming on the scandalous sight of a woman turning out his bunk and looking like a vinegar bottle at his novels of high, not to say rank, adventure. For in those days Bodinar took nips of cayenne, swallowed chillies whole and spiced his mental food to match.

The introduction came at length over a dinner which the man began, as usual, by sitting on the edge of his chair and coughing gently at intervals behind the back of his hand. His conversation at such moments verged on the precious in style, till by food and drink he mellowed. At last came to him, by the hands of Cornelius, a fateful plate of beef-steak pie.

"Never," said he, craning his neck to look at the contents of the other plates, "never have I seen anybody but the ONE that rolled meat for a pie with the fat in the middle of each roll."

The company glanced guiltily at Cornelius, who coughed in gingerly but significant fashion. The meat rolls were the rolls of Bessie Bodinar, but the pastry was the pastry of Cornelius, fairy light, not stodgy. In Simon's mind there were certain lines of suspicion like the tracks across the moor that are kept marked by the passing of stray footsteps. In these days his thoughts incessantly turned Bessie-wards, for she was about him in his uprising as in his lying down. Thus, for instance, when he saw the boy being dosed with poppy wine for stomach ache, he could not but ask himself how the deuce could poppy wine get aboard the *Pendragon*, for it was Bessie's remedy for everything, from chills to heart complaint. Long before he actually clapped eyes on her, he had been living in her atmosphere. To-night, at the style of cutting, at the succulence of the onions in the duck, he sat and gazed, and when the carver's spoon fetched out a sodden lemon pulp, he fairly started.

"It's the very spit of Bessie's cooking," he exclaimed. "How it brings her back! A man may be thankful when he hasn't got to handle a woman that blows like a trade-wind, steady, steady, and always with a gentle pull agin ye. It's worriting. 'Tisn't natural when ye find a woman going to bed and getting up next morning, day after day, in the same mind."

"Did you ever know one like that?" asked Billy, leaning forward with a fellow feeling for the man.

"Ay, Bessie," said Bodinar. "When us first married her kept a lodging house with lace curtains to every window. I dunno *when* I was more comfortable than the first few months of our wedded life. And a piano in the drawing-room. Many a time have I vamped out a tune upon it. Her could do a steak-and-kidney pudding for a prince, and after sea-pie and lobscouse and hard tack, you can do with a steak and kidney.

"But it didn't last. Her got too near with the money. Said I spent too much upon grog, and cut my baccy down to eighteen-pence a week. Shameful, I call it, with me cox of the Brixham life-boat. Said I must turn to and work, and the house filled with lodgers and her up washing dishes till midnight every day of the week. Such ingratitude as her was showing to me, for I used to hang about the doorstep, pipe in mouth, so's to give an air of the briny to the house. Worth scores of pounds in advertisement I was, with my jersey and high sea boots. I never begrudged the wearing of 'em, for they used to say that to see me was nearly as good as to go to sea for a week. And without the seasickness, too.

"Then it come. Thunderclap it was, too. Says she: 'I've filled up every corner of the house and 'tis ill-convenient for you to stay here. In fact, you must go. For I've no more use for 'ee. If this is having a husband, I'd rather be without one. So you can clear—for good.'"

"'Bessie,' said I, 'isn't there a cranny, not a fold-up bed in the kitchen what I could have?'

"'Not a sugar-box,' says she, sneering.

"'If I quit, I quit for good.'

"'That's what I meant,' said she.

"And I went, for I thought she'd soon call me back. But her didn't, being a woman of blind understanding and like a mule.

"A whole year passed; I'd been knocking about, coaling and that, when one dirty November night I got round to her doorstep. Thinks I, 'tis the dull season, and there'll be room for a homeless cat—or a sailor man. That's what I felt like when I seed they windows with the Nottingham lace curtains and the polish on the door-handle. Done with 'Bluebell,' it was every day. Up the steps I went and rings. And there I stood, a great galumph, with my hat in my hands and the rain running off my oilskins. Then an idee struck me. 'Can I have rooms, ma'am?' said I. 'Drawing-room floor I should prefer. Expense no object, but a fire constant, me being from sunny climes.'

" ' A single man ? ' said she, staring and sizing me up.

" ' Single and blessed,' said I.

" Well, I took they rooms and stayed there a week. Stayed three. And but for a sort of a curl at the corner of her lips Bessie never gave a sign her knowed me. But her cookery ! Oh, scrumptious ! Cauliflower with sauce ; boiled mutton and turnips ; rabbits and onions, a tender dish like sucking-pig. You see I was the only lodger.

" But I warn't happy. For her'd sing about the house and go out evenings. And I couldn't tell what was up. I was pretty dashed, I can tell you about what to do. Then Joe Craddick lent me a book, one by a chap called Jacobs, that by the look of it knows all there is to know about sailormen. And there 'twas all in black and white how a fellow come back, same as me, lodged with his wife, and got another chap to break into the house, so that her should be made to scritch to her lawful husband for protection against the burglar, and so make it up with him. Says Joe Craddick to me, ' Can you work it, Sim ? '

" And us did. One night he broke a pane of glass in the pantry window, and got into the house. He'd blacked his eyebrows and put on a beard. And up he comes, stump, stump, up the stairs. I'd got my room door ajar ready to rush out and knock 'en down, the very minute Bessie should cry, ' Save me, save me, Sim ! ' "

" And did she ? " asked Billy breathlessly.

" Did she ? " said he witheringly. " Not she. Out her comes on the landing and gets a good look at Craddick. His beard was all awry, and then her says soft and quiet to me behind the door, ' Mr. Pascoe, if any of your other friends should want to see you, kindly ask them to call a little earlier in the evening than two o'clock in the night. And there's a pane of glass that'll have to be paid for.'

" Craddick, holding the jemmy he'd brought like a poker, stood for a minute and stared. Then he quit. Bessie had to open the front door to him.

" An awful woman," continued he, " but clever. Her'd seen the book open, and marked where that chap Jacobs had planked it down about the sham burglar.

I'd been fool enough to leave it about, and me not being a reading man, her wondered what I was up to with it.

"I pretty nigh lost all hope then, till it come to Christmas. 'Twas dinner-time, Christmas Day, and there upon my table in that dull old drawing-room upstairs it stood—my Christmas dinner; a helping of fowl, all white with crackling skin, bread sauce, brussels sprouts and brown, rich gravy. Lord, it brought the tears to my eyes! 'Twas a blow-out fit for an admiral. And then there was a slice of plum-pudding and a mince pie. I sat down and thought.

"Me up here all lonely and cold with that fowl, and her down there in that warm old kitchen. And when I saw her'd given me the wishing-bone of the chicken, I sat there—and blubbered. Real tears come, I give you my word."

"Well?" said Peter.

"Well, I down to the kitchen with that helping of fowl. Her told me next day that I'd splashed the gravy on every step.

"'Bessie,' said I from the doorway, 'I can't bear it no more. Take me back, will 'ee? This here wishing-bone's broke down all my pride. There's to be carols to-night. Us'll go to 'em, arm-in-crook, and to-morrow I'll clean the boots.

"'Sim,' says she, and makes a dash at me.

"'Bessie,' said I, all comfortable with her at last, 'why for goodness, did 'ee stand out so long? You must have known what I was after all this time.'

"'Sim,' says she, 'I reckoned I'd bring you to your marrow-bones. I wasn't going to have any high and mighty ways with *My* husband.'

"I sometimes wish I'd got her back," continued he, "for her wasn't a bad old bit of all right—till her took to her mother's ways. But that wasn't till I'd gone down under, gone down under for good, I reckon."

Slowly the door behind him was pushed further ajar. Knyvett rose to his feet and stood with one hand pressed on the table, his left eye twitching as it did when he was excited. His long, brown, lantern-jawed face, apart from that, was almost red Indian in its taciturn expression.

"Journeys end in lovers' meetings," said he, with a smile curling round his lips. "Come in, Mrs. Bodinar. I guess you're wanted after all."

Bodinar rose, chap-fallen, to his feet.

"Then," said he to his wife, "the poppy wine was yours and I'm not so mad as I thought. Good Lord! What I felt when I saw they steak rolls! Bessie, did you make that pie?"

"Not the crust, Sim, not the crust," sobbed she.

"Well, I'm—gallied," clucked Mr. Cole.

"But I never said you splashed the gravy on the stairs, Sim, I never did. I was as glad as glad to hear 'ee come clop, clop, down the stairs. Do'ee mind how steep they was?"

"Ay," said he, eyeing her. "It *is* you, Bessie, isn't it?"

"It is, it is. I've give up the bad trade, too, though there's a mort o' money in it. I've give it all the slip, all what you hate."

"And the chillern?"

"With Maria. 'Twas the chillern that began it, Sim."

"It was so, Bessie."

"Say you're glad to see me, Sim, say it."

"Well, you're aboard, there's no gainsaying that, and I suppose you'll have to stay. But how many more petticoats be in hiding?"

"Ne'er a one. But, oh, Sim, the first few days and the rolling of my innerds! 'Twas as if I was being creamed up and down."

But he was serious, now that the impropriety of the whole proceedings struck him between the eyes. Mrs. Bodinar divined it, for he had always been "strict with her."

"'Twas Mrs. Knyvett that settled it, and she ought to know, a lady like that. And, oh, Sim, I was sick for 'ee, I was. Strike me dead, if I wasn't. Said I to the chillern, 'I'm going away to dad.'"

"Poor old gel," said he, "bit filled out, but not so bad, after all, considering your years." There descended upon him the instinct of possession, of which is made up nine-tenths of the bliss of the long-wedded man.

At this juncture the company thought fit to retire, only the boy put his head in from the pantry:

"You bain't half a man," said he encouragingly to Bodinar. "Why don't 'ee take her round the waist?"

"Ay, why don't I?" asked he. "There's no just cause or impediment, is there, Bessie?"

"None," said she.

So Sim and Bessie were united—*en secondes noces*, so to say.

But Mrs. Bodinar would never have made such a good landfall as this had there not been strange affinities between herself and Mrs. Knyvett. For the poorer woman had failed exactly where the richer one could feel the sting of failure, namely, in ruling her world—her man and her bairns and the strange entities that do squeak and gibber at the séances of modern witchcraft. In Mrs. Knyvett, lying like a hidden rock in a river, there was embedded a vein of mysticism which caused her to hanker after the secrets of other planes than the grossly material. And, like the small personal habits that link or divide more distinctly than creeds, one's attitude towards the occult marks the calibre of the personality more inevitably than either rank or education.

Partly, too, it was Mrs Knyvett's love of the definite that attracted her to that Eastern philosophy which maps out the planes of the supersensual in colours as simple as a Mercator's projection in a modern atlas. Alternately repelled by the chicanery and folly of the mediums and attracted by the apparent simplicity of Theosophic explanations, she hovered, an uneasy ghost between Haeckel and the Bhagavad Gîta. It was a matter of unfeigned rejoicing to her to hear that the Royal Society talked of a land arising in the Pacific, thus unconsciously verifying the Eastern prediction that a new continent is in course of preparation for a new race. The name of Nietzsche was to her a red rag to a bull: yet no one believed more firmly than she that man is a bridge, not a goal.

To a woman of these views Mrs. Bodinar seemed like a sort of unholy temple of the obscene gods; she would not attempt to deny the possibility of witchcraft, she would only hate it as a pandering to the baser instincts.

Mrs. Knyvett had been able to reconstruct the tale Bessie told her. She could grasp, too, the character of the man in it, the quickly fired imagination, the longing to get a leverage by which he could make things move, the straining against the bonds of circumstance in him. Most working men accept the fact of their individual powerlessness. This was what Simon could not do; he even hated the rich man's use of electricity and steam.

Like his wife, Bodinar was Brixham born, though originally his forbears had been moor-folk of the West Cornwall district. It was from a Bodinar offshoot that he had inherited an ancient cottage on the outskirts of the tors that cluster at the base of Great Kneeset. To that homestead the pair removed a few years after marriage with the intention of wresting a living from the moors instead of the sea. From the stubs and the turves they made their fire, just as their ancestors had used the moorland granite to build the walls of the two-storied dwelling with its huge chimneys that in every bedroom jutted out like squatting figures of Buddha in whitewashed masonry. They milked the moor like a great cow; it gave them whortleberries for their jam and bracken bedding for their pig.

Brown and lusty, eating huge meals after their tramps, they watched the hoarded sixpences grow. He "tealed" the garden and she nursed the chickens and helped the bees to their labours. Both found their labour good. Broad-backed and brown as October ale, they would play horse-tricks on one another like wild Indians.

Then the shadow fell, the prelude to the coming of a child. She would not believe it at first and went off to a wise woman in Exeter. That night Simon found her in a chair before the fire with her apron over her head, rocking herself to and fro. It was not pain that she feared but change, for Simon had left her once or twice already.

And would he stand the muck and muddle of a child-rearing house? She fought, however, and went "stubbing" on the moors to the last minute. It was a wonder the child was born under a roof.

Everything dropped from her hands then, for the field-woman was no neat housewife, no mother. Squalor came upon her, and drink upon him, for it was her constant companionship, in neck and neck running side by side, that had kept him straight. Now she had to stay at home and rock the cradle. The cottage grew hateful, so they let it with the old Windsor chairs and China dogs to an artist and came back to Brixham. One thing he had not lost, his animal courage, so he took to the sea as of old and she stayed at home to feed the children by her ancestral trade, the trade that seemed the last nail in the coffin of Simon's self-respect.

The only pride he felt now—and pride was necessary to him—was his sense of his skill as a seaman, his belief in his own stores of secret knowledge. Amid the sickly miasma that gathered round them both from her fortune-telling, he would withdraw his mind to these hidden delights. As a boy he had kept a treasure-box, stored with wych-hazel divining rods and such like; as a man he collected sailors' yarns of treasure trove in Pacific Islands or on the riven cliffs of Trinidad. When he drew charts and made calculations he felt himself in possession of secret power.

"Hungry, that's what he was," said Bessie.

"You want to go with him?" asked Mrs. Knyvett. "You know it'll be a fearful tossing for you."

Secret fear leapt in Mrs. Bodinar.

"I want," said she, "to be there when they learn the outs of the voyage."

"When," said Mrs. Knyvett quickly, "they find they've been cheated, you mean?"

Mrs. Bodinar's eyes flashed, then filled with tears.

"Ma'am," said she, "I know no more than the dead. Gold-dust he had, but 'twas gravel as I turned out of his breeches, not black dust at all. I dunno. My head's all addled to think upon it."

"Mrs. Bodinar, if I induce my son to keep his word and take you, will you do what I ask you?"

"Yes," said Bessie. "For I shall go mad if I stay here, not knowing what's going on t'other side of the world. And I want to get away from what's following me. You know, ma'am. Oh, let me go, make it so that I can go!"

"Then tell me where you think the weak spot in this story lies."

"I misdoubt," said Mrs. Bodinar slowly, "what happened between Simon and the chemist that give 'en back the gold-dust. The name, they say, was Pycroft. Well, it's Pycroft I want to see."

"Ah," said Mrs. Knyvett; to her mind the woman's answer revealed more knowledge than she was willing to confess. Bodinar must have had rascally dealings ere this and Bessie knew it. No doubt Coronel, like most outland towns of South America, was full of men who were wanted. Over there, with her knowledge of her husband's past, Mrs. Bodinar would be invaluable in unearthing the secrets of this pesky puzzle which was beginning to irritate Mrs. Knyvett intensely. For to see her Billy busy over it, he who had managed works that were national affairs, was to this proud woman a festering pin-prick.

"You see, ma'am," said Bessie, following up her own affairs, "I've got to get rid of something, too. You catch spirits in the air, you do. They get all round you, nasty evil things. Ugh! I can see 'em. They cling round like a smell. But they say you can shake 'em off if you go down, down, down, with the world slipping by underneath you. You'm changed. You slip by the seasons, quick, as if a year had gone over your head like a flash."

Mrs. Knyvett's heart leapt, for she, too, was counting much on the sea magic. She wanted the tang of the salt winds for her son; the smell would be antiseptic. She remembered how, as a child, she had loved to open the old book in which her father had pasted his collection of seaweeds! Acrid, clean it was, like the smell of pitch, yet with a wildness of flavour that knew nothing of building yards.

"You shall go," said she firmly. But it was with Uncle Pip that she had had her fiercest battle.

"Women aboard!" cried he, "cluttering up the scuppers like broody hens. Fool-talk! What! does the man want a wet-nurse then?"

"If," said Mrs. Knyvett firmly, "there is ever going to be any unravelling of this mystery, *this* hen has to go on the cruise."

"Mystery!" snorted he, "who said there was any mystery?"

"And if there wasn't," snapped Mrs. Knyvett, "wouldn't a certain gentleman adventurer not three feet from me feel rather flat? And, by the way, I'm not deaf, you needn't use a fog-horn."

In her anxiety to get Billy away, her temper was wearing thin.

"God! Madam, don't lose your temper. *I* don't care whether the poor cuss goes or not."

"And the poor cuss will be practically useful," said Mrs. Knyvett drily, "for she's the only person who is personally interested in making Bodinar walk in a straight line."

The wisdom of Uncle Pip could not deny this. So, in dead of night, Mrs. Bodinar had been smuggled aboard, accompanied by a great number of corded boxes which she lashed round the bunk on which she slept like a Bedouin encamped in the desert.

In those days, ere she made that beef-steak pie, she dwelt much in memories, always of her time among the moors, for the steadfastness of the hills was a comfort in a tossing universe where the swaying lamp filled her with a sickly horror. She remembered how on the moors lost lamb and wandering ewe would bleat afar, then rush together, with much joy of tail-wagging. Would she meet Bodinar like that—apart of course from the matter of the tail?

Deliberately between herself and the chaos of this hurtling world of wind and sea she set the image of the

Great Earth; the wash of waves, she called the lash of rain on the roof; the wind in the shrouds, the whistle of zephyrs through the trees. Every hook on which it was possible for the imagination to hang fair broidery of phantasy she used. The yellow milk from the ship's goat was rich pasture-fed ooze of clover or violet; the crowing from the deck-coops was sweet to her ears as morning note of barnyard ecstasy. A litter of black Berkshires would have effaced from her mind the horror of the hell-deep chasms, the green mountains of the Atlantic; in lieu thereof, she betook herself to the galley and made marmalade.

For always, Nature had been personified to her as a vast mouth; the most interesting part of mountain scenery was the sight of sheep fattening, of birds wheeling through the air in search of flies. Cornelius's fishing contraptions fascinated her soul, but she regretted that the Atlantic does not yield blackberries, mushrooms, or whorts. Meanwhile she kept herself close-packed as a cocoon and slept "all standing"; forced occasionally to undress for ablutions, she shuffled on her clothes in hot haste as a knight his armour when the darts are already hurtling on the castle walls. She was a woman in an iron mask.

Bird-like the *Pendragon* flew south for, leaving the long mountain chains of Madeira behind, the next day they caught the trades in the latitude of the Canaries. The tropics were at hand, heralded by the appearance of the first flying-fish. Nerves lost their edge in the soft freedom of the steady blowing canvas, nerves that in the baffling winds had crackled with electric storm. The crowded earth, the narrow sea straits were forgotten. Steering in the starlight at night, Peter Westlake savoured the sweetness of the constellations with a text from Job on his lips; the Angora cats leapt from yard to yard or basked on the sunny deck; Cornelius danced a cake-walk and the concertina in the fo'c'sle kept time to the clucking of such hens as were not in the stomachs of the saloon passengers. It was the Barefoot Days, ere there fell upon them the weariness of the Belt of Calms. Each reverted; Billy bared his soul and Cornelius his sides. Each man filled out to the globular shape that would have been his, had not the attrition of human intercourse fretted him down to a spindle-legged pair of compasses. Only, like a fly in amber, Bodinar remained unchanged, steeping himself in the comfort of his Bessie's *petits soins.*

Then each day the clouds on the horizon piled themselves to hurricane height, but no rain fell. Towards night-fall the sky cleared. Only so, or in deserts, does one see the full glory of the star-strewn sky, Venus throwing silver furrows across the sea, Orion glowing red and green as over Arabian desert. The shadows were growing shorter day by day and soon the Magellan clouds would be showing near the Southern Cross.

It was when pacing the deck o' nights in the second watch that Billy talked most freely, for the changing heavens o'erhead seemed shaking him loose into new latitudes of resolution and endeavour. The stars they had seen so often over the misty hollows of English meadows were changing now to something new; for cow-parsley and the wind among the clapping hands of the beeches, they had the ceaseless rustle of the shrouds, the never ending swirl of waters.

It was of the *Pendragon's* days as a "Holy Joe" that they talked one night. For Peter would have it that his cabin was haunted by a shadowy spirit with ice-nipped nose and watery eyes, whose unofficial log Billy had been lucky enough to come upon in a second-hand shop in Portsmouth. True it was that more than once the fell of seamen's hair had risen at a breath in the dusk of a ship's gangway. Noises there were, too, rustlings from upper berths, when men lay still in terror to listen to queer turnings and heavings overhead. Yet how was it possible that a man who had posted lists all over the ship for the captain to remember could possibly have mislaid himself on t'other side of Jordan? Perhaps he missed his glazed bag that accompanied him everywhere. Its contents were duly noted in the log: "trinkets, beads, toys for natives; needles and thread;

a few biscuits and concentrated essence of meat ; matches, paper and pencils, sketch-book, church service, thickly printed book of some sort to read," and so on. He had much trouble with his mates, men who "came aboard with heaven on their lips but not in their heart" ; yet this was not to be wondered at since he read "The Daily Service in the Cottage" to the sailors at the breakfast hour and worst of all, a missionary work called "Hope Deferred" that sapped the courage of the crew.

"He hadn't any guts," said Billy, plainly Saxon this time.

Then he went on, from the sky pilot's work with glazed bags and cottage sermons, to talk of his own ; of the long desert days he had spent in building a dam in Egypt. Peter could see him now, a keen-eyed, hard-bitten man sitting over his plans in the light of his tent lamp with the African moonlight outside. He spoke of the trouble with Arab laisser-faire, born of generations of sun-warmed, date-fed ease in a land where the lash of an overseer has always been the means of driving muscle to its work. With such a tool, and with no lash but the will, had Billy done his job, worn to a shadow, but buoyant to his very heart. It was the best time of his life, for it had ousted everything from his mind but the narrow gangway of accomplishment along which he had to walk. Then there was that bridge in the Punjab ; it was the English gangers and the spirit of the river he had fought there. For this man who sought his peace in wild places, who hated Pall Mall like a pest-house and felt the air of St. James's to be a charnel blast, had learnt to feel the spirits of the earth ; river-spirits that sing in the vast in-breathing and out-breathing of noise that they make ; the spirit of storm that flies in the spindrift ; the spirit of strength that speaks in the sheep-cry among the hills.

Looking at him, Peter wished him back in the struggle with the earth's stubbornness. Billy answered his thought.

"I'm going back to my job," he said, "when this cruise is over."

Leaning over the bulwarks, swaying to the cradling he loved, he looked over the foam-flecked blackness on which they moved. His eyes had the far gaze of the sailor that is satisfied with nothing short of the horizon. Out here he, like the sea over which they moved, began to assume his true size. On over-crowded soil he shrank to the size of the men about him. Blue water, desert, or hills: these were his backgrounds; trim-built villas with aspidestria plants in the windows were but cells to a sea-gull. That was why he was so silent there.

"I was in an earthquake in 'Frisco once," he said, "the queerest thing was the feeling that the solid globe was melting under me. A rocking steeple took away the sense of the eternal hills. One learnt then how much one reckons on the steadfastness of the universe. The mind goes mad in sight of chaos.

"That was how it was with me when Sara married. It was not the marriage itself. She had instincts to satisfy, she was a woman. It was that I should have been so blind. I made her a goddess and after all she was a woman, waiting, ready to be wooed. Oh, I cannot say it——"

With wide flung hands he gesticulated.

"But the steeples tottered, the eternal hills were moved. In all the plumbless heart of woman's nature and man's there seemed no foothold even for an eagle's rest. God! those days!"

Peter held his breath, for the heavens were opened and the deep spoke.

"I thought she knew what she was to me," said Billy, on a lower level now. "Then I learnt—after a time—that what she was to me didn't so much matter, after all. It was what I was to her that mattered. And so I stood by, to help if need be. Well, she knows now. And after all the pinnacles may totter, but the eagle has his wings. They are his resting-place. That is Love. What I could be to her; that was it. All that had gone before was just instinct, the man seeking his mate. And that had been snatched from me by Vin Hereford's contrivance and Bellew's acquiescence."

"I'm sorry for Bellew," said Peter quietly.

"That fellow!" flashed Billy, "a scabby simulacrum of a man, spoiling the daylight with his ghastly carcase. To think of him near her! But," in lower tones, "he doesn't touch her now."

Both men were silent, Peter dared not question here, for he had long ago taken off his shoes.

"Through it, after all, the woman remained untouched, the essential woman, the thing that looks out of her eyes. I know it now. I didn't then. That was hell number two for me. Not the hell of the rocking universe, but the hell of the creeping worm."

"Yes," said Peter, returning to Bellew, "he is, I suppose, a poor tool, but a poor tool in skilful hands may serve to plane a board. He's never had skilful handling yet."

Then he flushed, knowing that he blamed Sara. But Billy never saw it.

"That's where it comes in," said he, "my mother swears there's a woman who could do it, who gave all once and who would give all again to save him from himself. I don't know that he's worth it. But it's give, give, give, with every woman; every man's to her like the child she feeds at her breast. Only to the man she gives her life-blood. God! what does the race want divine beings for when there are women?"

"To compare them unfavourably," said Peter slyly, "with the angels in petticoats, of course."

Billy laughed.

"If Sara knew—what your mother thinks?" asked Peter in a whisper.

But Knyvett was silent, for he knew the answer deep within him, since her duty to the weak ones was the one o'ermastering claim that Sara acknowledged. She would never stand in the way of another woman's good work. "If she knew?" to Billy the question did not assume that form at all; it was "Will she ever know?"

Not from him certainly; that was as clear as the shining of an arc-light in the darkness.

"Yet," said he, "Bellew gets it all down. In his books, I mean. Have you ever felt something grinding down, down, down into you against a raw tendon? For that's the way life itches against our sensitive nerves nowadays. Bellew gets that impression into his books every time, you know. The way women goad and torture and madden and tempt—and hold aloof. Or once given, fight for their own hand and show that they've just sold themselves for a competence, huckstering like pigs in the market that which is the precious jewel of their lives."

"I didn't know you understood that," said Peter. "But it's like that, I suppose."

"Ay," answered Billy, absent-mindedly. "But it's a tie like Sara's and mine that yields the best of all. If I went away for twenty years I should find her the same to me."

"And perhaps find her as you did—when the pinnacles tottered."

"Yes, perhaps. Given to another man. But although he might know her sweet nearness, she could never be to him what she is to me. I never see anything beautiful but what she speaks to me in it. She is always present in my thoughts—my woman, whose undraped loveliness I have never known."

Peter moved uneasily: Jew as he was by instinct for imagery, he had a certain fear of the largeness of the Greek vision of woman. The Paphian goddess seemed, in faith, both to him and Anne, a being overlavish of her charms. Then the fallacy of the reasoning struck him:

"There's nothing exclusive in that. She might come to forty men in the beauty of the world. What's to prevent a crowd seeing her where they will?"

Billy laughed again.

"And why not?" said he. "Who am I to expect her to waste her sweetness on me alone. You talk like a fashionable milliner, Peter, of exclusive designs."

"Do you mean to tell me then that you're content to go shares with all the world? Don't tell me, Billy, such nonsense as that. For if you do I only know it's a lie," exclaimed Peter, coming to the ground with a crash and dragging the other with him. The man beside him burnt from within, his lips tightening, his face twitching.

"Got home there," said Peter to himself and the next moment was sorry; 'twas too much the act of a cold-blooded demonstrator.

Truth to tell, Sara was to Peter but a handsome, dark-eyed, queenly woman who sometimes when she played had a trick of recalling to him a chapter from Isaiah or the Book of Job. At other times he disapproved of her music. That was the nearest point he could reach to the lyrics of this star-gazing rhapsodist.

To Peter, also, Bellew was, very decidedly no scaly varmint, but a big man, a much paragraphed publicist. Never would the little man have dreamt of sharing in such distinguished company. Nor, indeed, had he truly shared, for Bellew was barely awake to his existence.

"Yes," said he tentatively, "it's like Dante and Beatrice, I suppose, but——" he shrugged his shoulders about his ears—"there's something deathlike about it, too. It's big—and draughty."

"'The windy ways of death,'" quoted Knyvett softly. "Yes, it's like that. That's why I am going back to my work. I can do nothing for her, I who would coin my heart's blood into drachmas for her. I have gone through it all and come out on the other side. I must go away—not to forget, but to remember what she was, what she might have been to the world, what she still is to me."

There was in his tone a vast regret that made Peter stand more at gaze than at anything which had gone before. He was coming now to the heart of things.

"An unfulfilled life. No, not mine, hers. And that's the worst of all to bear. I'm no poet like a Senhouse, who can find comfort in the reflection that his lady is above all the powers of hell. That isn't so in Sara's case. His Sanchia was different. She was a goddess with a gift for mathematics. She found opportunity for both playing the divine and adding up sums. She had ledgers and men to handle. But Sara has neither. She is injuring her man by standing in his light, the light that comes from love. She is only driving him to the pursuit of a phantom lust. And she has no ledgers. She ought to have drunk deep at the fountain of experience, to have known all, so that she could speak it in her music. Instead, she is starving, strained on a leash."

"Then tell her. Make her see," cried Peter, flinging the weighty Tables of the Law with a split across their middle right in the path, "it must be hell to feel like that."

"It is."

"And her ruin, it would seem."

"Don't you understand," cried Billy impatiently, "that she's above me. We men have played the potter with the pot too long in women's lives. We have wanted to cut them all to our idea. Now we must leave them alone. We cannot be their salvation, we can only damn, not save."

"That's a lie," said Peter hardily. "Don't you see that she might rise to what you say is in her, if it weren't for your infernal squeamishness about dirtying your little finger? Isn't her fulfilment more to you than your own noble-mindedness? Damn such puling, whining morality, that I should say so. A goddess, say you! But what's the good of that to her, if she doesn't know it? A damned sight better make her a woman. Billy, 'tis you, not Bellew, who's the egotist. You're like the prude, too holy to risk her precious purity by contact with the fallen."

"Am I God, then, Peter, that I should decide the issues of life for this woman?"

"Are you," parried Westlake, "by any chance just juggling with yourself? Are you afraid of social damnation—for her, of course? Do cuts and slights and lifted eyebrows and significant silences worry you at all, for her? Are you, in fact, afraid to face the music? Do you care?"

Billy laughed. "Not a straw," said he gaily. "And if I did, the gossip that follows Bellew is worse than anything. But do you reckon that the flying skirts of a wingèd Victory can be damaged by the spittle of a snail? Lord! Peter, she'd be above all that. The people who can *do* things are, you know. The man or woman who can create, can interpret, doesn't care a tinker's cuss whether he gets *At Home* cards."

So the talk closed on a lower level, but Billy was as determined as ever. Sara's right to her own life was as inviolable as the sanctity of her body would have been to knights of old. The demands change, but the spirit remains.

With the crossing of the Line, when Knyvett began to utilise Simon Bodinar's knowledge of these South American waters, the seaman's pride was reborn. He walked with a new light in his eyes; rejoiced in the spring of the vessel beneath his hand when he took his trick at the wheel. The crew mocked his attitude behind his back.

Yet the plan he sketched was good; it was to strike for Fernando de Noronha and falling in with the local monsoons, if luck served, run down the Brazil coast with the northeast or north wind. Then, crossing the mouth of the Plata inside of soundings, make the land along the Patagonian shores to the region of the Cape Horn drift. Five times he had sailed southward by this route and Knyvett never regretted taking his advice. That was something to remember in the days that were to come.

Before the nor'east trades they drifted to the tropics under a haze as thick as November in northern latitudes; they grew to hate the smell of pitchy seams, the aimless breaths that, when the trades fail, flutter over the calm of a sea of glass disturbed by naught but the flying fish and the bonita. At night the gates of the west were brazen, till somewhere about latitude 7° south, they first sighted the dark patches of the Magellan clouds. Day after day the eyes scanned the sea-line for the fleecy trade clouds.

One night Cole rapped at Westlake's door and called him up; it was dock-calm, no ripple, no cat's-paw, only an oily swell across which the vessel cast a black shadow along the edge of which played the silver foam of phosphorescence. Then they saw the strange sight noted not once nor twice by Spanish and Portuguesee navigators—the ringèd moon, its broad gold face encircled with a red haze, its redness paling to the dark green of the night sky. Over the bulwarks the men gazed; then came a redness in the east, while the moon's ring began to fade to dull pewter, to recede it seemed into distance as the daylight conquered. The silvered tracks faded to sea-dimness as the sun rose. It was a vaster world than they had known before, this world where the constellations played their age-long game.

Then three bells sounded and the cry of the watch. They were cradled in a big hand, these men who watched or slept. Human calculations of space and time shrivelled to nothingness before the contemplation of the celestial clock-work. Across these waters the older navigators stole half furtively, offering here an anchor and there a prayer to the Star of the Sea, and flinging overboard at times a balk of timber to the appeasement of the tides. So they crept between the domed vault and the shifting sea-floor. One must not tempt a mood of anger from powers so great as these.

Two days after the ringèd moon it came—the mood of rage that gathers in the inky thunder-clouds. For hours the barometer had played queer tricks, till at last it provoked a whistle from the skipper who called Bodinar quickly; neither had ever seen it lower. Then Mrs. Bodinar learnt what "dead-lights" mean on the port-holes; with every stitch of canvas stowed save the fore-topsail they waited. And the blackness gathered over the noonday stillness, with ugly flaws of wind like smiles on the face of an idiot. Each man to the other was by now but a dim shape. The nerves shrieked for a break to the stillness, but Mrs. Bodinar in the galley boxed the ears of the nigger when he dropped a pile of plates. Then she cried, in both instances doing just what every man wanted to do.

Peter refused to go below; so lashed in the waist he waited. Two days before they had spoken an English vessel, twenty-one days out from Rio. That was, he supposed, perhaps the last English voice they would hear. An extraordinary loneliness had come upon him, with a sinking at the pit of the stomach and an alertness to note both sight and sound like that of the savage. All the higher centres of thought seemed dead.

Inky-black with a sulphur edge to them the clouds assumed weird bird-shapes. Peter began to read them as he might have read the shapes in a fire. Then he loathed them, tried to escape seeing them, but failed.

"Sou'west, half south," came a voice.

"Sou'west, half south," came the answer from Bodinar at the wheel. The man was on his mettle; he had no fear here. Yet there had been a row with him only last night. He had charged Cole with stealing a sovereign from his sea-chest, then he had finished by being beastly sick.

The watch was turned now to figures cut in ebony against the first flow of molten sheet lightning.

"It's coming," cried Billy; "hold on, Peter."

Just for a moment Westlake found time to wonder what it felt like to wait for a hurricane with your own ship under you. Rum feeling, surely?

Then the heavens opened and it seemed that the sea was gone; something was shaking him, Peter, beating the wind out of him as maliciously as a terrier teases a rat. He hated it, wanted to hit back. Then the sea made a clean breach of the vessel and stove Peter's chest in. He felt it go; as a matter of fact, he discovered afterwards that it was the weather-side of the galley that had gone. There came a cry from the darkness to the men holding by the life-lines in the waist and Peter heard their oilskins slither in the extraordinary sense of hearing that was his between blind deafness and insensibility.

The mercury must by now be going down, down to Davy Jones's locker. Where they were all going, in fact. How would Anne take it? Would she marry someone else? She ought not, for he had waited so long for her; sick of self-pity, his heart, which for all practical purposes was located in his stomach, yearned over himself.

The next moment the deck was standing upright and he clinging to it by toe and nail like a big land-crab. There must surely be a crevice in it that would give a foothold; it stank of oozing pitch. Then came a huge crack, amidships it seemed, and the shuddering sense of an endless fall, with the shriek and howl of caged winds overhead. He had an instant's glimpse of black depths, and then, quiet. Quiet! he had always heard of the silence at the sea-bed.

WINGS OF Desire

He was clutched by an arm round his body and found his lips against a dripping cheek. Blood on it, too, he could tell by the taste. Then the man stepped across him on all fours and he thought nothing more of *him*.

Hours after a wave curled across a bulwark. Peter lay and sobbed, for the crest of it was white and the trough of it green; the light was coming back. It was the darkness he had dreaded most, but now the blessed light was coming, he could even begin to feel it on his eyelids. Then he saw Billy at the helm relieving Bodinar for a spell and steering so that the waves struck dead aft. They were all death-cold from the water that had gone over them and Lethbridge with a broken arm. Peter could not tell how he knew it, but he did.

Battened down below, Mrs. Bodinar listened to Cornelius moaning and retching. She wanted to get at him to kick him, but the fact that the place was knee-deep in slop-water seemed to deter her, for she could not move to lay her hand on a floor-cloth. Then her thoughts flew to her husband; how dared he leave her down here to die like a rat in a trap? Still, she would let no shriek escape her, lest the darky hear. A filthy black tool. He should know her a white woman, anyway, to the last.

But Bodinar's bones would fly off God knows where into the ocean-bed, and she would be alone shut in here. She kicked the door and stormed. Yet that was all wrong, for she would surely be flying in the air, like the queer things she saw when the fit was on her. Then she knew she was more afraid of them than of the crawling beasts down below; far more afraid. And Bodinar, where would he be that read bad books and drank? Nor would she have taken her davy that he was all straight with women.

At that moment sense failed and the brain reeled from the hammering it had suffered. She was vaguely now repeating sea-phrases over and over again: "flogging the clock;" "a damned Shinnanikin," "a damned Shinnanikin"— At last it was quieter; she could feel the soreness of the lips she had been wetting with her tongue, could make out the straining of the burdened masts, the creaking of the blocks. 'Twas like the agony of giving birth.

That woke her, for they might live after all. If so, they would want her fire, her cooking. She paused for each slant and began to crawl cannily on all fours towards the bogie-stove.

It was her moment of triumph, the sweetest in her life, when she handed the steaming pannikins of coffee up the companion. It was good to be a woman as she watched the numbed red hands clutch the hot stuff. With a sob on her lips she turned to goad Cornelius to frenzy by her taunts.

So, with foretopsail in shreds, with broken bulwarks and salt encrusted deck, the gale left them. And forty-eight hours later by the blessing of God the trade clouds mustered on the sea-line.

Leaving the white pinnacles of Fernando de Noronha on the port bow, they struck for the yellow lines of beach, palm-fringed, of the Brazil coast and so on into the vast pear-shaped harbour of Rio glittering white in its tracery of tropic green—and hiding in a land of eternal spring the filthiest sores of human disease. There were no letters; only the eternal "Como no," the "Why not?" of South America began to ring in Knyvett's ears. A rage possessed him to come to grips with something tangible. To him the weather change that met them at the edge of the Roaring Forties was a real joy.

Now at dawn the decks were clammy wet, the nights cold, and instead of albacore and flying fish they met "the Falkland island pilots,"—the penguins flying by in dazzling lines of light. Then came southwesterly winds bringing with them miles of crested waves winged with the storm they fled from.

Behind their flying spindrift lay the shadow of the Horn.

CHAPTER XII

DUKERIPPEN: IN THIS MRS. KNYVETT PLAYS THE SIBYL, AND STEPHEN ANERLEY THE MAN

IT was a wonderful day of stir and movement; snowy domes and pinnacles of cloud showed the vast depths of the blue dome and the tree-tops swayed beneath a southwest wind. The better to see and hear, Archer Bellew threw up the window of his study. With the opening of it came the sound of a tarantelle from the low granite doorway of his wife's music-room.

The back of the house at Craneham still retained the quadrangular shape made by the buildings of the former farm ; only the central space had been filled with grass and the barn transformed. It was dedicated now, as Uncle Pip used to say, to Orpheus, not the Georgics. For by removing the flooring which had made the place two-storeyed, they had exposed the ancient blackened timbers of the barrel roof and with newly plastered walls, fresh flooring and a platform at the far end, it was found to possess fine acoustic qualities. Here Sara had placed her grand piano and was free to practise at any hour without disturbing the house.

Bellew returned to his work, for he was at that moment undergoing the Chinese torture which consists in squeezing a body into a basket and then paring off the extruding flesh. In less cryptic language he was paring down the flesh of his new book to the bones of it, for he was a creator who also wanted to be an artist—after the fashion of to-day, which consists in never using two lines where one will do. The thing that stood in his way was his gift of national consciousness ; he was constantly caught in the eddies and whirled in the tides of popular instinct. Hence, he often lost sight of the rounded totality of the individuals he visualised. Would he paint a city clerk, there came to him instead the rows of suburban streets, the aura of clerkdom. Between the historian and novelist, his work was that of neither. He knew it and suffered in his artistic conscience ; he felt like a domestic Muse with her hair wind-blown, Mænad-like. Hence his pencil whistled across the paper in savage lines of erasure.

He envied the doers, people with something tangible to their credit. Even the plump white hands of his banker appealed to him, his transactions were so neat. If only someone would just give him a stone to hew in the foundations of the temple of England's righteousness ! Yet he had a letter from Molly Woodruffe in his pocket.

At last he saw Anne Hereford cross the garden-plat and threw down his pencil-stump with a sudden admiration for these sisters who refused to be stifled by the provincial feather-bed. Had things been otherwise, would Sara, he wondered, have merged the artist in the mother? At any rate, he had nothing to regret there. Supremely pleased with himself, he felt his pulses begin to sway to the music that had now changed to a dance metre. Obeying a sudden impulse he followed Anne's white-clad figure into the cool gloom of the music-room, caught her round the waist with a laugh and began to dance.

Laughing, swinging to her music, in the glimmer of the candles on her piano, Sara played on. The scent of beans, of honeysuckle and tall white lilies came with the wind that swayed the candle-flame in streams of yellow light towards her. And all the while Archer enjoyed the gaiety of the moment; why by now he might have been a heavy paterfamilias and Sara have boasted a double chin. This lightness of heart engendered a certain looseness of fibre; he ended by pelting Anne with yellow plums and going out to look for Molly Woodruffe, who, with a "dear Mr. Bellew" had announced her return to Dartmouth for a ten days' holiday. She had been ill, wanted a rest and so ended "with kindest remembrances."

Left alone, Sara bent to her work, hot on the mastering of difficulties. She played on, stopped to analyse, to repeat, rejoicing in her own powers. The darkness gathered outside, till circling jackdaws were replaced by wheeling bats, but she took no notice, now that the work was going. For the artist has to plough the furrow wearily just to train his Pegasus for the wingèd moment that comes but now and then.

She had hurried across the dew-wet garden to her work at six, then had followed the day's routine till now. At length, tired out, she threw herself for a moment on the chintz-covered couch and fell at once asleep. When she awoke the place was in darkness, for the candles had guttered to their sockets. She started to her feet in dismay; for all these hours her father must have been alone, since Elizabeth was ill and Anne probably shut in upstairs, at work on her M.D. reading.

Over the fire in the dining-room, now a mass of ashes, crouched her father, his foot beating an angry tattoo. The room was scattered with specimens and on the middle of the table stood a plate with a large piece of bread on it. She put her hand on the bell.

"It's useless ringing," snapped he. "If the mistress neglects her work, the maids follow suit. I rang an hour ago, but no one answered."

"I'm sorry, father."

"I've long known, Sara, that I'm nothing. But this sort of thing brings it home to me. I've caught a serious chill. But no one minds *that*, of course."

Hugging the fire, he turned to her the dull vacuity of his back. She flung a shawl over it, which he shrugged away with the wriggle of a naughty child. A frightened maid appeared and presently the room began to assume a more habitable appearance. Sara's heart fell, as she turned up the lights and noticed among the papers a long envelope addressed to a firm of curio-dealers—evidently an order. Then arrived the coffee.

"Now, father," said Sara, pouring out the hot stuff.

"And after all these years," he exclaimed, "you don't know that coffee gives me heartburn! It is rank poison to me. This sort of thing it is that proves to me how neglected I am."

His nose worked furiously.

"I thought that as you were so cold——"

"And whose fault is it, if I am cold?"

"Come, father. Risk it to-night. I don't want you to catch a cold."

"The chill is upon me, Sara. It is too late for your repentance now."

But the flavour worked in his nostrils; he supped eagerly and noisily, bending his nose over the bowl and warming his hand on it. The homely gestures, the noise he made, moved her to weariness as did his snores in the long evenings. She was impatient to see her life waste like this. The night cometh when no man can work and here she had to wait, tied hand and foot, to watch the slow wasting of the candle. Dark things moved in her, thoughts that no one expresses in words.

Solemnly he placed the plate of bread before her.

"Look at that," he cried; "it is not fit for human food. It is sour! Taste it. The fermentation which that bread will engender in the human frame is—is—explosive. And that is the bread which this family has been feeding on for weeks and months! I am not strong enough to go round, or I would order in samples of every kind of loaf in the neighbourhood and if necessary get bread from town. But there is no one to attend to anything in this house."

Much refreshed, he shuffled across the room to the bookshelves and reaching down a Bible, turned up the Psalmist's praise of the virtuous woman. Mouthing the syllables he read it aloud, while the cat played with the tassels of his dressing-gown, and finally closing the book with a bang said solemnly:

"Let *this* be the ideal. Not sour bread, neglectful servants and hours of loneliness for an old man. But I say nothing."

Sara sat leaning her cheek on her hand. She was back in the past when she had fought death on his behalf. The very feel of her head as she bent wearily over the food-warmer came back, the racked nerves, the sinking heart at the thought of his death. She remembered her long grateful sleep when the turn came.

But now, she wanted to be free. Yet if he were gone, she would only long to bring him back. So poised between crime and devotion she listened to his meandering.

"Must this go to-night?" she said, holding up the long envelope she had noted.

"And now I am not even to get my letters posted!" he exclaimed. "But I will go out myself."

He bundled his grey skirts round him and prepared to face the night as a man plunges from a diving-board. He had a dread now of trusting the commonest task to anyone; forty times a day he would ask if a letter had been posted. Then he caught Sara's eye.

"It is an order," he said defiantly.

"Then," she answered with a flash of fury, "the things cannot be paid for. Please understand that."

"You can always get money from Archer. One of our biggest names——"

"Understand, once and for all, that I will not ask money from Archer."

Again she saw the miserable old figure crouching over the letter, afraid even to trust it to anyone to post, longing for a few baubles denied—and for such sordid reasons. She held out her hand for the envelope.

"All right, father," she said; "give it to me to post and I will find the money somehow."

Meanwhile out of doors Bellew had caught sight of a white figure making its way up the hill out of the town. He followed it till, under the last gas lamp that flickers yellow on dark green leafage, he saw that it was Molly. Beyond was the open country, bleached now to its very bones, with its cornfields lying grey in tawny stubble. Molly walked on, great grass-hat on the back of her head, little thumb cocked up against the tall stick she carried. At the first stile she leant, till at last a field-mouse flitted by on its unseen wires of legs. The girl turned and saw Bellew. He stood bareheaded for a second and she thought how much greyer he had gone. For all these months they had not met.

Now she laughed as he caught her right hand in his left and drew her up to him. He watched the blush rise, well content. Then dropped her hand and laughed in his turn.

"So you wanted me," he said. "Forgiven? Am I not?"

"Um, yes," she said, dropping eyelids, but amazed at his confident tone. She had written that letter in distant terms of friendship and yet he met her like this. But it was always so; she in heroics at absence, and he, ready for the day's pleasure when they met. Tremulous, yet angry, she walked by his side.

"Wasn't I wise?" asked he. "Could we have met—so radiantly—you and I, had I not been wise?"

Bitterly she thought of her summer, of her sense of her own lightness, her lonely ache, her disgust at the dulness of her work, and of her own inability to keep her mind on the simplest task. Anger was rising in her like the night wind whose moan means a gale before morning.

"And the great Stephen? How is he?"

He looked at her and laughed.

"I don't think, Mr. Bellew, that I'll go any further," she exclaimed pettishly.

"Why, Molly, we haven't met for ages! And look! Surely you don't want to go in yet?"

He pointed to the pale fields, to the shadowy woodlands under the pearly sky. The night-moths began to thrill, and at the sound he saw her bosom rise and fall. Putting an arm round her, he drew her nearer to the shadow of the trees.

"No, no, no," she cried. All the past and the present seemed rolled together in a great globe to confound her. "Let me go back."

"Likely, isn't it?" he exclaimed.

They stood so for a moment. He was trying to awaken the sweetness of the past with touches, with passionate words. But she grew colder and he knew it. Lying, eyes wide opened, against his shoulder, she watched the swaying of the trees. The wood murmurs, while they thrilled his blood, cooled hers. The hour fought for the man, but something more powerful than hour or man was within her.

"Don't. I hate it," she said at last. He let her go and began to argue, but she scarcely heard him. She had called him back and she was glad she had, for now she had fathomed herself at last. But he misunderstood and in a torrent of words offered her flight. With fingers interlaced and head bent she walked down the field. When he had done, she wondered why so many myriads of women had yielded at pleading such as this.

"And those things you dreaded before?" she asked, "the secrecy, the lies, the ugliness of the hotels?"

She was even then picturing to herself the stuffed fox in the hall of some old country inn, the ancient mouldy furniture, the chambermaid, farm-wench, or golden-curled minx. Just the things that a few months ago would have been simply stones on the path to fairyland.

" You don't mind them now ? " she persisted.

" Molly, dearest, not with you. Don't you understand ? "

" Only too well."

" Don't you care for me any longer ? "

He put a hand on her breast and pressing a momentary advantage, " Love me," said he. " Dearest, 'tis just the secrecy that will make it sweeter."

So he was lost.

" And what about the man I am to marry ? "

And looking up at him, she read his thoughts ; it would be safer so, with Stephen as a blind. More than that, she could already feel the parting it would mean every time, her own sick dread and misery, the man's light-hearted good-bye. And shuddering cried : " Never, I never will."

She saw him just as he was ; willing to go as far as was necessary for his own gratification and calling the excursion by all sorts of fine names. She probed his eyes with her look ; his took on a brutality that a man may well assume, once exposed. She compared him with Anerley and found herself unworthy of an honest man.

He made no attempt to follow her when she turned resolutely away, but plunged into the wood where she could hear him forcing a way through the undergrowth. She remembered the short story of his she had read in a review, a piece of cynicism in which the several women who had loved a man were brought together into a room, there to tell their secret history to each other. Molly understood the humour of it now.

At the entrance to the town she hesitated, feeling it impossible to go back to-night to her mother's house. For self-reproach fought now in her with longing for the thing she had refused.

Soon after, sitting alone in her great drawing-room on the temporarily rented cliff house which was always filled with the sea murmur, Mrs. Knyvett heard the knocker on her front door gently lift and fall. Instinct told her to answer the summons herself.

She was a ready woman and made no outcry as she drew the girl into the house. With dishevelled hair and skirts bedraggled from the dusty roads, Molly needed but a few faltered sentences to tell her story. For a moment Mrs. Knyvett stood frowning, lost in thought. Molly misunderstood her attitude.

"I'll go," said she, with a catch in her breath; "I oughtn't to have come."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," interrupted Mrs. Knyvett. "I'm only thinking how we can cover up your tracks. No, you shan't go back to your mother. Better not, for every reason. But I'll send a note to say I'm keeping you."

Half an hour later, warmed and fed, Molly told it all in the pleasant upstair sitting-room, where only the sea and Mrs. Knyvett's ears could hear it. Softly for a moment, when it was over, she laid a hand on the girl's head and then went out of the room.

"Molly," she said when she came back, "do you know what I've just done? I've wired to Stephen Anerley, telling him to come at once."

The girl got up and Mrs. Knyvett watched her intently.

"Did I do wrong?" she asked at length.

"I don't know. I'm not fit."

"No, perhaps not. That's for him to judge. But he mustn't be played with any longer."

Molly flushed angrily, for this hard judicial tone was the worse to bear, following as it did on sympathy and pity.

"Good night, little girl," said Mrs. Knyvett, rising and striking a match for the candles. There was a half smile hovering round the corners of her lip that carried Molly in stately fashion out of the room and into the one that had been assigned to her. There she flung herself down and abandoned herself to a wild fit of sobbing.

At midnight, when she still lay awake, shaken every now and then by a long hard shiver, she heard a soft knock at her door as her hostess entered, shading a candle with her hand.

"Ah, I thought so," she exclaimed, as Molly turned her face away. And the mother-fire alight within her big, masterful body, she lay down and drew the girl into her arms, warming the cold frame against hers and stilling the aching sobs against her breast.

"Little girl," said she, "didn't I lay out a beautiful nighty for you?"

It was a billowy garment of softest white silk, lavender-scented, like the beautiful white room in which she lay. Molly felt homey and suddenly yielded herself to the comfort beside her. In the darkness Mrs. Knyvett smiled and then began to talk as no one on earth had ever heard her talk before. When Molly thought of a night that might have been and shivered, Mrs. Knyvett drew her closer still, for now she understood every flutter of this storm-bird's heart. The nightdress, with its soft beauty, was intended to minister to the self-respect she wanted to bring back to the girl.

She began by taking her listener straight away into the core of her own life. She spoke of her ambitions for her son, of how every step of the way had been planned out. Concealing nothing, she told of her misery at seeing this waste of his best years, of her desire to see it ended. Nor did she leave any doubt of the end for which she still hoped.

"But she's married," cried Molly, knowing no difference between the legal and the moral bond.

"Pouf! Not to Archer Bellew! Not in any real sense!" cried Mrs. Knyvett. And Molly wondered the more, for this was a new world to her, this, where everyone was taught to pay his debts back to the uttermost farthing. She had always lived in the market place, where one gets as much as possible for as little an outlay as can be safely accomplished. But here, the very joy one felt was a gift to be paid back—to the race that had made it possible.

Then she shrivelled, appalled at herself.

"What you must think of me!" she gasped.

But Mrs. Knyvett only waded deeper into the stream, for she knew her world well. Molly burnt, as her words flowed on, for you would have sworn, to hear her, that

Mrs. Knyvett had the ears of a Delphic oracle whom nothing escaped. She told it all, calling it "the philanderings of Bellew"; this woman for her skin; that for her wit and devilry; t'other for the goodness of her dinners.

"Oh, no! he never went over the border. You, my dear, might have had a proud position—the only one he seduced. 'Twas the country atmosphere, of course, to-night—a clownish, bumpkin habit—goes with cottages and woods and cornfields, you know. Archer Bellew's always in the picture That's it. You were a milkmaid and he the bold bad squire. Had he met you in a dancing room, 'twould have been played in the footlights instead; in a studio, all attitudes; on a platform, midnight talks à la Russe. I know the man. His rooms are in St. James's; or the Albany, now, I believe. And his wife making both ends meet at home."

Molly shrank; wounded pride stung and rankled. She shared the contempt, for Mrs. Knyvett used the probe, nor spared.

"He'd have forgotten you the sooner. That's all. Also part of the routine of a *villeggiatura*."

Then, changing her tone, she told, without a name, the story Margaret Rossiter had lived down.

"She'd wish me to tell you, I know that," said Mrs. Knyvett. "To save him from doing any more harm. I never hesitated over *that* to-night. I know I am breaking no confidence. For she—cared, cares. That was love. Not giving herself. Oh, no. In fact, I think she loved least then. She learnt it afterwards. And if you ask me what love is, I must confess I don't know. I don't. But it's God's own smile. Margaret Rossiter has it. And Archer Bellew has never come within ten thousand leagues of it, though he's written about it all his life. Oh, it's all plain now. Scores of things are. I remember her going suddenly away from a picture show and now, years later, I recall that Bellew held back a curtain at that moment. And how often I must have pained her with my tongue! When I think of how I've laughed at their ménage, his and Sara's, at his goddesses. Oh, my dear, I feel scorched."

Molly had joined her at the fire long ago and lay ashamed.

"What does your love look like beside hers? For she's cared all these years," asked Mrs. Knyvett.

"I never loved him."

"No, you only obeyed an instinct. And if you'd actually given in—well, child, there's been tons of sickly rubbish talked about *that*. Of course, you could have got back. That's the plain truth. But you'd have had to suffer damnably. And then again you might not have got back. It's the acted lie that's the worst and if lies become the habit of the soul—well, I can hardly bear to think what that soul has to bear to get used to the truth again. It's like pulling the scales of corruption, like so many skins going in pain and agony. And from that God save you! Do you know the other day I sat in the Queen's Hall listening to a wonderful speaker who was rolling out the ages like a scroll, running over races and peoples back into the abyss of time. And one saw the puny folks, oneself a pin-point among them, slipping down into darkness. I thought of my own little problems and of Billy's. What did it matter? Hindus, Chaldeans, Persians, Celts, Teutons—we were all just slipping over and away. And a race scarcely seemed bigger than a unit."

She suddenly put her hand on the girl's bosom.

"Little matter enough, it seems, whose son lies there, or whether any son at all," she said softly, and the girl's eyes smarted with tears. "And little matter enough whether that son's mother be a pure woman, or rotten through and through. For she's just a solitary wheat grain in a field of millions uncountable. So much pother about a thing so small."

The girl kept quiet, unable to speak; this older woman came so close, with such truculent reverence, to the heart's core.

"My dear," said she, after a silence, "to reframe an old saying—if there were no God, it would be necessary, not to invent, but to make one. I'm not always sure of the shaping hands that create us from outside, but I'm always sure of one thing, and that's the God in germ within each pigmy of all the millions. He must be there, for I feel Him so surely in myself, in everyone I've ever met. If there be no God, then we are making one, we, the undistinguished ones who fade and leave no visible trace, we that make up the races that pass like the shadow of a cloud. That's why you matter, you and your son that may be."

In an awe too deep for words they lay in silence. But Mrs. Knyvett knew that she had carried the child into a large room. She laid her hand on the girl's heart and Molly knew why. She was calling to the deeps within.

And presently the younger woman fell asleep, while Mrs. Knyvett watched the dawn whiten on the blind. There were none but Greek pictures on these walls, stern gods of the loveliness that uplifts, save here and there a Madonna with the face of a Demeter. This was Mrs. Knyvett's room for girl guests and several whom Society regarded with uplifted eyebrows had slept there. Many worse, in fact, than storm-tossed Molly who ate her fruit and drank her tea there next morning. Under the roses on the tray was a letter in her mother's writing.

"You will not return to this roof," it ran, as though Molly were a homing pigeon, "until I receive a full account of why you failed to return to the shelter of your home last night. For the reputation of the lady whom you have chosen as chaperon instead of the mother whose whole life has been devoted to your interests is scarcely high enough to cover such wild escapades as you indulge in. Such is the new woman, I suppose. I am sending, as impertinently requested by her, a portion of your wardrobe. When you wish for my protection, you will comply with my conditions. Until then I remain your sorrowful, *broken-hearted* mother,

"FLORENCE MARY WOODRUFFE."

Contemptuously the girl tossed it aside, calling it naught, yet feeling the gall of it all day. Below in the garden she found her hostess, in stout gardening gloves, tying up the trailing branches of clematis and wistaria that rioted in all the flower beds. Both felt it a relief to meet with the scent of earth in the air and the fillip of the wind in their faces. Night and morning nerves are two different things.

Neither mentioned Stephen, yet both felt him in the air like a vast o'ershadowing. Before lunch came a wire; he would be with Mrs. Knyvett that evening. Some hours later from the door of her bedroom Molly heard a ring and his voice in the hall. Then the downstair sitting-room door banged. She could fancy the two sitting there in a grey green gloom discussing her fate. Through the summer overgrowth of the creepers over the windows one could catch glimpses of the sea.

Stephen Anerley sat perfectly quiet while Mrs. Knyvett told plainly what she knew of last night. He seemed unable to break the silence even when she had finished. From his downcast glance she could tell nothing.

"Did you guess why I sent for you?" she asked point-blank at last.

He nodded, then rose and stood with his back to her, looking out of the window.

"How much of this," he asked at last, turning sharply, "did she wish told to me?"

"All of it, Stephen," she answered, calling him by the name she had often used as a boy. Instinctively she wanted to soften a hard core in him.

"She tells you; you tell me; there you have two channels of possible misunderstanding."

"Perhaps you mean misrepresentation?" she asked curtly, her temper rising.

He lifted an admonitory hand; she could have slapped him, remembering certain passages in his youth when, as he stood between his father's knees, she had talked baby-talk to him. Then she stopped her foolish irrelevance, for she loved Molly in proportion to the help she had been able to bring her. And Mrs. Knyvett loathed the mendicant whose sores she could not heal.

"Not conscious, of course, unconscious," he agreed, in the tone of a professor who defines subjective and objective.

Mrs. Knyvett felt that a bit of a breeze was wanted here. Then she was sorry for him since plainly he suffered.

"Stephen," said she, and wondered whimsically how many times of late she had asked this question, "do you really love this girl ?"

"Well enough to wonder whether I love her enough to make her happy," he answered.

"And that's the first sensible thing you've said to-day," she cried.

"Where is she ?" he asked.

"Upstairs, trembling at the sound of your voice in the hall," said she, woman all over, and marched to the bell. He thought it was to send a maid for Molly, but drew breath of relief when she merely said, "Whisky and soda."

They waited till the servant had come and gone.

"You're an honest woman, Mrs. Knyvett," began he, when the whisky had put some mettle into him.

"Call no woman honest till she's been tempted," returned she, amazed at the pluck of the young cockerel.

But he persisted, not to be turned aside.

"I ask you," said he, "as an honest woman whether you think we've a chance of making a success of it, she and I. Here you are sending to tell me—well, that she was within a fraction of an inch of bolting with another chap. Now, you wouldn't call that a happy prenuptial omen, would you ? I love her, it's true, but too much not to shrink from making her miserable for my own—pleasure, shall we call it ?" he finished grimly.

"Mrs. Knyvett," he began again, "I want her to be happy. And all this summer she's been writing letters —well, never mind—you know. Letters a man cares for. And then you say she whistled him back—like that."

Whining out into silence, his voice trailed away like a chance-struck violin string.

"I know," she said, "but remember her home. She was so wretched there."

"No, that's not enough. For, once married to me she will often have dull hours, cannot fail to. Heavy times are bound to come, you know. Bound to. And every time it's collar-work, is she going to kick over the traces? Won't do, you know. And if she feels like this before marriage, what the deuce will it be after? No, it won't do. It's no go, no go."

"Sit down, Stephen Anerley, and listen to me, for I knew the world before you were breeched. I'll tell you the fact. I was tempted to—give her a push and let the thing run. With Bellew, I mean. I had my own reasons. It would have been a way out."

Stephen's eyes flashed.

"But the child was too good to be offered up even by a mother. She was a brave little fighter. I couldn't give her a kick. *And neither can you.*"

"But it's for life."

"Of course it is, or it looks so, now. But it doesn't do to say 'World without end,' too freely."

"Mrs. Knyvett," he laughed, "you really are a desperate neck-or-nothing woman."

"I am. I always liked a diving-board that kicked you off before you had time to realise your nakedness. Now, Molly's got two natures—like most women, only we know less about women than about any other of God's creatures because we've told each other such lies about them. With one hand she reaches to the light, and with t'other down. Well, for practical purposes and unlikely as it may seem, you're the light. You can't go from that. If you love her, you won't fail her. That's all there is to it. Take her away, put yourself between her and temptation."

"You're asking me a big thing."

"I am. I'm asking you to be a big man."

"Or a fool."

"Or a fool. It's very seldom you can tell t'other from which."

"Let me see her," he cried. "I won't be sold, nor buy a pig in a poke."

Mrs. Knyvett went away and presently Molly opened the door and closed it behind her softly. She would not advance a step to him, but stood, face twitching and eyes downcast, her fingers pleated together in front of her.

"Molly," he cried, "Molly, oh, how could you?"

They stood like chidden children side by side.

"You know, that night, how it was," she said, her bosom heaving, "you knew it. But you went on."

"But that was different. I won you. And afterwards you were mine. I trusted you."

"I know. But I'm not . . . in one piece. And he understood."

"And I don't?"

"Not always. For you put me right and I want to be thought adorable."

She smiled and he wondered how she dared.

"At any rate," he exclaimed bitterly, "he didn't waste any self-respect on you. Oh, yes, he understood you very well. And I didn't. That's all there is to it."

"Yes," she said, so low that he could scarcely hear. But it was a matter she could not discuss.

"Oh, why, for God's sake, couldn't you act straight?" he burst out. "I loved you, hadn't a thought that wasn't yours, was looking at houses, planning for next year."

"Dearest!"

"Don't say that. Don't dare to. For I don't know but what you'd be the better for a good beating."

He turned away. Then he heard a click on the polish of the table. It was her ring.

"I've tried to act straight. Another woman might have deceived you. I didn't do that. But I'll not be schooled any more. You treat me like a naughty child. And if I've done wrong, you know it. I've told it. I didn't lie."

"But it's what it shows——" he murmured.

"And that's no matter to you now. And if there's nothing in your life you don't want me to know, well, be very thankful. It'll save you from this wretchedness. But you're a hideous Pharisee."

Not beyond reach of her darts, he stood frowning.

She had tried, it was true. Nor was he one who could cast a stone, for he had not even tried, had gone the easy way before he met her.

She held out her hand.

"No, no, I can't let you go. You love me?"

"I don't know. I don't care now. But I'll not be browbeaten any more. If you can't understand, then you can't. But if you're a prig you needn't try to whitewash everybody you come near."

Furious, she raged, while he lifted her off her feet and kissed her cheek, exclaiming: "Forgive me." And she, nature crying within, did so.

But Mrs. Knyvett was not satisfied by this *redintegratio amoris*. She planned, in fact, a hand-book for the use of the newly wedded, so fast in those days did wisdom bubble from the springs within.

And first she tackled Master Stephen: "You're come," cried she, "across one snag in the river. Let it be a warning to you to avoid the rest. I always want to act the devil's part and take everybody up at least once in their lives to see all the kingdoms of the earth in a moment of time."

"Yes," said he with a twinkle.

"Yes, says he," she mocked, "and I might be talking Choctaw for all his understanding of it. Don't you make the mistake of shutting up your wife within four walls, young man. Take her up every now and then and yourself, too, where you can get a panoramic view of the varsal world. Let her feel the globe spin beneath her feet. My lad, the women of this generation can't be cramped into a kitchen or a nursery—and least of all into one of those front rooms in the second story of a suburban villa, where there's a double bed with an eiderdown—and bored satiety and mental vacuity therewith. Let her go out and live and feel herself part of the big procession. Don't starve her in brain. Let her speak; she can. Go and hear her. And be thankful you've got a mate, not a plaything. She's got brains at least as good as yours and instincts five times as strong. You've burnt your fingers once with *them*. But don't let her brains atrophy. They're the biggest inheritance she brings you. And just a baby or two, of course. Not many, for we really don't want, you know, so many as we did when war and pestilence killed us like flies."

To Molly her words were few but pithy. "It's only," said she, "a woman who is enough of a woman that can help a man to his manhood."

But the girl knew next morning that she had been only too much of a woman in the low sense when she saw on her plate a letter in Archer Bellew's handwriting. With two pairs of eyes burning on her face, she opened it, read, and then handed it to Stephen. Now she understood the saying of the man who excused himself for getting drunk by pleading he wanted to get off the eternal wheel. One could never stop the whirling of the infernal thing.

The letter was a mere request, earnestly worded, for the favour of a last interview with the writer.

"Say that you will meet him, but must bring a friend with you," said Anerley.

"And the friend?" asked Molly.

"Myself."

Mrs. Knyvett flashed a glance at him, for she would gladly have had him different. Yet she understood, for, after all, he was risking his all on this cast of the dice and naturally wanted to see his wife with the man who might have them cogged in his favour.

Molly frankly hated Anerley. He could do a generous thing, but not in generous spirit. He wanted to know exactly how true her story had been. Yet she forgave him, too, for she was learning that where one loves, one must ignore the spots on one's sun. All the same she scarcely opened her lips during the hours that elapsed ere the two stood together at the place she had appointed to meet Bellew. It was a point on the cliffs well known to all three.

At last they saw a man approaching, his head just a black speck against the sea as he walked along by the stone hedge that protected the cliff. Molly moved forward to the strip of grass that led by a cliff path down to the cove beneath. Then she saw from his face that Bellew had caught sight of Stephen standing behind her . . . like a pillar of salt. She grasped wildly for self-control, but the melodrama of it all struck her so overwhelmingly that she laughed aloud. To her nerves her own laughter sounded ear-splitting in its ribaldry.

Bellew was the first to recover himself; he was wildly enraged and therein Stephen not only scored the first point, but got a good grip on his own coolness.

"Might I ask," enquired Bellew, "whether this is a comedy or a tragedy that we are rehearsing? For the lady seems in doubt. That it is the fifth act is, of course, evident."

"Miss Woodruffe," said Stephen, "wanted me to be here, for she has done me the honour to say she will marry me."

"And has, as I happen to know, a taste for histrionics. For she is, of course, the protagonist in the drama."

Molly noted his inability to use simple words. Weird concatenations of barbarous Latinisms whirled in her own brain. The whole genius of the Saxon tongue began to shriek at her for reality.

Then Stephen walked away, not without a certain pharisaic consciousness of the fine part he was playing. As he did so he heard Bellew exclaim in stifled tones:

"What the devil do you mean by making a laughing-stock of me like this?"

Half hesitating, Anerley wondered for a second whether he ought to leave her alone with a man in such a mood as this. Yet Molly's coolness reassured him.

"You know," said she, "that I did not mean that. No one meant it. But I wanted to do the straight thing by you both. There have been lies enough."

They walked side by side down the path to the beach. Round a tiny headland to the left they could look down on a black chasm. At the base the wave broke on piled up rocks, seething beneath the nesting places of the puffins that starred the ledges with the whiteness of their wings. The grasses at the edge of the cliff waved in the wind that eddied round the bay. Below, the line of surf broke on the red-brown sand. Across on the far side of the wide bay the sun made a pathway across the sea. Inland a garden-party was in progress and the faint sound of the band wound itself into that sentiment which, in a girl's heart, is the prelude to passion. It laid hands upon her while Bellew pleaded, with the dark figure of Anerley seated on the cliff edge giving point to his eagerness.

Archer was proud of his own eloquence, but Molly scarcely heard his words as she swayed to and fro in the mingled music of the sea, the band, and his voice. Still, she struggled. She had forgotten the man up above, but Bellew had not; the consciousness only fired his tongue.

"No, no, no," she cried at last.

They were both by now up against *That Which Denies*. In the girl it was something within her own nature; in the man it was something without, the baffling power of a will that is other than one's own. Molly's mind was a citadel that repels the foe by flinging back the siege ladders. In her, thoughts crowded after the first silence before the onrush of attack. She remembered everything; scenes of childhood, previous yieldings, former battles.

To Bellew it was a blow in the face that stuns till, maddened, the mind flings itself like a bull on the assailant. He fell upon the plainly querulous complaint of a child at last.

"But I want you," he cried: "don't you understand that I want you?"

"I'm brain, and heart, and body," said she, also simple now. "You haven't any use for all three."

"I want you for your sweetness, want you as I've never wanted any woman yet."

"But not for keeps," said she, smiling at the childishness of her phrase. "Not for keeps."

Before the bare truth he stood in silence. It seemed as hard to argue with this child as to grasp a cloud.

"I want you."

"I'm sorry, but I can't."

"Then, damn you, go."

She stumbled up the path, dislodging pebbles on her way. Panting, every now and then she passed her tongue over her lips. She could feel the saltness of the sweat on her skin. All her brain was alert now, for had it not struck its blow for freedom? She was going to Stephen, because, on the whole, he meant what her mind chose as best, honourable right doing in the sight of day. It mattered, indeed, what she did—to herself. For she was a little universe, the only one of which she had any sure and certain knowledge. Mrs. Knyvett had builded better than she knew.

Yet the girl could see Bellew's figure on the sands; it turned a corner and was out of sight. And with it her heart seemed torn from her body. Then she was ashamed. She had chosen the lower levels, the comfortable smugness of easy life.

It was no conquest she had won, for it left her with this pain that turned and turned like a sword in her heart. She tried to remember that Bellew had held her lightly, would not have minded making her an object of suspicion to chambermaids and porters who would read her story in her face. Yet all that was nothing now, for she could only see a black dot on the sands.

Hands clenched in his coat pockets, Anerley came up to her. Without a word they sat down side by side, staring out to sea like two huge birds. So still were they that the dry rustle of a grass snake was quite audible and the drip of watery ooze from the cliff sounded like a perpetual spray of falling water.

The darkness throbbed into the bay beneath, till the surf was a thin white edge against a heaving blackness.

Molly sat with her arms across her knees, staring out to sea. Every now and then she sobbed convulsively, while Stephen's eyes followed aimlessly the circling flight of the homing gulls. Great lashing blows seemed to have been laid across his nature, so that the weals striped his back. For he was ashamed, but of what he could not tell; perhaps only of the human plight.

Then internal laughter caught him, for next week he would very likely be writing a paragraph of journalese about Bellew.

The girl shivered and he took off his coat to put it round her. When their hands touched, he found them clammy-cold and so chafed them, holding them against his waistcoat. Till that he had thought of going away, of giving her up. Then he knew he should not.

"Molly," he said, "you care for him so much? But you know it won't do?"

And that was about the truth of it after all.

Then, very slowly and sadly, they went back to Mrs. Knyvett, who put Molly to bed with a hot water bottle at her feet and three pillules of aconite inside her—against chill. For it's no use adding catarrh to the troubles of the heart. But Stephen sat up half the night, wondering at Mrs. Knyvett's audacity. In the morning he put it to her straight: "Was she doing right?" For he had a simple-minded way of needing reassurance in big things, though he was a very confident man in small ones.

"My dear Stephen," cried she, fiercely alert, "I know I am. And if you could only tell how hard I've been praying 'Lead us not into temptation,' these days, you'd have mercy on my nerves and not go over your tracks forty times in the day."

So Mrs. Knyvett married them from her house in town. The bride's mother was present in dark green and a complacent demeanour, for things might have been far worse, though of how far she remained ignorant to her dying day.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SLEEPING LADY: IN THIS BELLEW SENDS ROUND THE FIERY CROSS AND THE READER MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A SELECT COMPANY OF ELEMENTALS.

FATHER BACH died away into silence as Sara looked up from her piano keys to find her husband standing just within the lighted circle that revealed the heavy timbered roof of her music room.

"What is it, Archer?" she exclaimed sharply.

This was exactly the question he could not answer, for no man will openly acknowledge that he does not belong to those elect ones who can lose the game without slamming the door.

Yet Bellew had just come from Molly Woodruffe with a pitiful rage of impotence in his heart. Deeper yet an instinct of cleanliness stirred in him, a desire to wash and be clean of lies. And below that, lurked cruelty; he wanted to wring his wife's heart, to force from her some sign of weakness. For she stood to him to-night as a symbol of self-control.

Unknown to himself, Bellew's attitude towards Sara was one of fear—not of her individuality, but of the superimposed reticence that came of her breeding. Her forbears had been scholars to whom self-control was second nature; his ancestors had bellowed out their rage in devil-hunts, had sobbed their contrition on penitent forms. Fineness of self-command he despised as brainless, but revered as something he could not achieve. Mentally he was unpruned; he told all, yet shivered at the solecism he had committed.

He settled himself in a creaking basket chair, while she longed to escape.

"Won't to-morrow do?" she asked wearily.

"No," answered he curtly.

And she acquiesced. Yet of late she had gone to bed night after night only longing to awake and find her burden gone. Somehow to childlike souls, it is always a surprise to discover yesterday still waiting for them round the corner of the bed-curtains.

"Sara! Sara!" he exclaimed, letting his hand clash on the keys. The dissonance was a relief to his nerves. He was struck afresh by her beauty; its oval calm had the aloofness of a Greek woman's without the mindlessness.

With a quick catch of her breath she listened and where a man would have marvelled at the second-rate nature he showed, the woman felt but pity.

It was, at first, a chronicle of the hard facts that lead to ruin. His sales were diminishing, he was deep in debt, had given promissory notes right and left. Worst of all, on his hands was an unfinished novel that would be a despair to everyone but his enemies. And he had several of these, for he was that fearful wild fowl in English literature, a naturalist in style and a pessimist in philosophy. For slapping the face of English idealism is like the pastime called riding at the popinjay; time and again the popinjay smites a careless rider on the jowl.

Sara was glad at the story; glad, not for his misery, but for her own power. Thrilling from head to foot, she bent down to him and sketched a plan of campaign against the approaching bankruptcy. Never had she been happier than now. Those shares, said she, must be sold; on that bit of her land a mortgage raised. With two lines on her smooth brows she planned how she would go up to her lawyer; fortunately Anne was at home to keep her hand on the helm. Flushed, even laughing, she recounted the profits of her poultry, of her small forcing houses.

"No! damn it, no!" said he, rising and pushing back his chair with a scraping jar. "I can't stand this."

He could not tell which of them he hated most, himself or her. He began to realise the mastery of detail she had always shown in her household management; there shone before his eyes a vista of spotless, shining surfaces, of perfection in such trifles as toilet appointments and careful account books. Even her well-corseted figure was a grievance and her immaculate propriety little short of an insult.

"I asked a girl to bolt with me to-night," he snarled, "and she wouldn't, because she is like you—thinks more of her own clean skirts than of anything else in the world."

Then, as Sara would have risen, he laid a hand on her and held her down.

"Sit there! Sit there!" he cried. "You shall hear the truth for once."

White and silent she sat without moving a muscle. The next moment his mood changed suddenly and with a laugh, he leant back in his chair.

"I wonder what you really think of me, Sara, behind those quiet eyes. You've done a very generous thing and I've only replied by insults. Gad! What a cur I am all round! Ain't I, Sara, ain't I?"

Before her quietness he felt like a ghost who cannot attract the attention of the living. He recognised this now as his attitude towards her during their whole married life.

"I wonder what possessed you to be so generous when I told you how I was going to pieces. Just the same feeling, I suppose, that would make you try to mend a smashed mug. Tell me, Sara, try to tell me."

She drew her brows together. Then he heard a shuddering sigh.

"I cannot," she said, "you hurt me so."

The childish phrase cut across his nerves like a whip. But the pain he felt only spurred him to his cruel self-imposed task. He recognised the weakness of his words, yet persisted for the self-relief it gave, for the cleansing power he felt in her cold nature.

There was nothing in the story she had not known all along. But painted now in simile and sounding phrase, it started from low relief to high. He described how a face seen in a drawing-room or at a street-corner would incarnate the idea that floated in his brain. Sight was followed by pursuit, by the hunting of the face till the nature behind had yielded its secret. So he had chiselled lives, women's especially, out of the marble of conventionality in which they were hidden. The process once completed, he tired. But not till he had stripped each spirit of its rags of concealment.

But behind it all, Sara knew that he felt like a Greek who had desecrated the secret of beauty, had dissected, not carved. The sense of sin he acknowledged was to her strange, unknown, extraordinary. She had never realised a feeling of guilt; it was as foreign to her nature as was the Hebrew God which stood for its symbol. She could not feel dirty; she could never feel sinful.

But Archer was in pain. She put a pitiful hand on his arm.

"I'm sorry," she said gently.

His eyes sought hers gropingly. For a second time he had aimed a blow at her tranquillity and a second time had missed the mark. It was incomprehensible to him. She was not a woman, she was a statue, yet an atmosphere of serene sincerity reached down to him.

"I've never felt my feet on the ground," he said.

This time she understood what he meant by intuitions finer than are moved by spoken words. He had not been born of a class that can with impunity spend a lifetime in spinning cobwebs. His father had begotten children, had spent a lifetime in toil and had at the same time secured, by proper religious investment, a desirable nook in the heavenly mansions. They were " fitty men " ; he was none. His talent had smeared a line of fog across his manhood.

" I'd never anyone who—just wanted me. You never did, you know."

She tightened her lips, judging him.

" But I wished you to know—about the girl, about everything. It seemed your right. But perhaps you did know ? And put it all aside ? "

" Yes," said she gravely.

" My life's been a lie. Old Vin began it. Then we awoke and found ourselves in the wrong Paradise. That was it. I deserved it, for what had gone before. You did not."

He wiped his forehead, for this process, which he had compared to a bathing in Jordan for health, was proving rather a muddy business. Still, he would stick to it.

" Before I wrote 'The Master Law,' I was under a cloud. That's a good thing sometimes. Shows who are your real friends. They said I'd stolen. But the girl I was engaged to didn't believe it. I was near suicide, for everyone turned against me, all but the girl. She came to me—by night."

Dead silence.

" That saved my reason. She came again and again. It's the best light in which I've ever seen a woman. And it's the only one in which I've never painted one. Couldn't, you know, couldn't. But I didn't marry her. I've always hated what I'd got and wanted what I hadn't. That's me."

" Why have you told me this, Archer ? "

" I don't know. Perhaps that you might look at me. You always give me the impression that I'm invisible to you. And I don't like the feeling. Don't like it at all. No, I don't."

He seemed to be answering an unseen questioner. Sara passed her hand wearily over her forehead, conscious more of being stunned by fatigue than by anything else. She got up, closed the piano and walked down the long room to the door of the house.

In the quadrangle, guarded by tall elms, everything was still. Thin as any dream the moon hung like a shadow behind a tree. In the blink of light from the doorway pale moths fluttered towards the white, upturned faces of the flowers in the herbaceous border. The sky was star-fretted, for the moon was but young in the month as yet. Like a great outspread cross the milky way lay above the house and over the velvet shadows of the trees. Country sounds filtered through the green branches, the cry of a mousing owl, the barking of a dog. A sighing breath came laden with the scent of sun-dried fields and behind it was the eternal sighing of the sea. Earth was held in the hollow of a great hand.

" Is she alive ? " said Sara. " Your wife, I mean."

" My wife ? "

" Your real wife."

" So that's how you take it. Yes, she's alive and famous. She didn't go under. Why should she indeed ? She was one of the best. 'Twas I that went down, contrary to the usual rot of the moralists. Funny how the thing rankles and stings in me yet. So long ago, too."

" And you a man ! " exclaimed Sara contemptuously.

" Ah, but it's different now for us," he cried eagerly. For the interest of intellectual argument obscured the pain of the situation. " There's a queer thing happening to men, to some of them at least, nowadays. For the standard of honour we've set up for women for so many generations is avenging itself on us nowadays. Things in a man's background that a century ago he wouldn't even have remembered—well, they gall and irritate us unbearably now. We have set up a Statue of Holiness and said to women : ' This be your God.' When lo, the thing turns on us and strikes us dumb. Half modern literature is based on that."

Sara laughed and the sound of it electrified them both. But it was neither sardonic nor cynical, for with a vital energy within that none had guessed, she was alert with desperate courage.

" I'm glad to know—all," she said. Nor was there the shadow of resentment in her tones. As a matter of fact, having dreaded knowledge, she was relieved to find how little it could touch her.

" But this girl—you spoke of ? " she went on, and to his amazement seemed merely anxious for his honour and the child's good name.

" She's safe. She's chosen a better man," he said curtly. Nor would he hold himself up to Sara's sense of humour, for he still wanted to feel himself no figure of fun. Quickly he skated from the topic.

" It's spoilt my work. That's all pinchbeck. I've been afraid to tackle a plain story. And the plain stories, after all, are the big things."

Sara smiled in the dimness to see how instinctively he felt himself the protagonist of the drama. Round him and his work centred all these perturbations. Yet she, too, had her work ; nor was she without a capacity for pain. Then she switched off the lights and went into the house.

Bellew watched her go with a sense upon him as of one who is steering through a fog-bank.

Strange as it may seem, he prided himself on his aristocratic virtues. Humility he hated. Pity, as shown to himself, was a wound to his pride ; as shown to another, a contemptuous insult. Thus, in his dealings with men. With women it was otherwise. For he held that the face a man should turn to a woman was the face of his weakness. In craving pity from her, he showed himself virile, for thus he conveyed to her that most subtle compliment, the perception of her own power.

A strange, cold woman Sara seemed to him. But probably he had killed something in her ; according to the moralists, that was quite right, for all religion, especially the women's brand of it, is mere purity by atrophy. Good women are as scarred trees, tempest-riven, windburnt.

In himself to-night many things had died, mostly illusions. For as flint striking flint produces a spark, so denial meeting demand had struck a flame in him that burnt up his dross. And thrown into the melting-pot, he yielded a tiny core of good metal. It was with pleasure that he recognised the fact that to-night he had at least engaged in the big contest. Most of us hide from it by rubbing against our fellows, by shutting out the stars with a flapping newspaper or a Bill that shall antedate the millennium. Bellew had performed the miracle with a figure draped in hues of dawn, videlicet, a dream woman. When she vanished he had a fleeting vision of the truth.

So long had Sara been in the habit of warding off sensation by petty duties that from sheer habit she took extra pains with her undressing that night. But at last the fine dark hair was plaited, the dressing-gown slipped on. She sank into a lounge chair by the window and with hands folded on her lap waited for what the night would bring, for even now her volition seemed to come from something outside herself. A light flitted from the staircase window on to the garden. Then its disappearance was followed by the clang of her husband's door.

With the massive sensation of relief from pain she relaxed all her nature. It had not been entirely her fault, this failure of her marriage. Something unknown, something behind her, had spoilt it. Then, leaning forward suddenly, she thought fiercely. For in a quick intuitive flash she had caught sight of the road in front of her. Now she was forcing her mind painfully to travel along the way that instinct had traversed in a second. We see solutions, but only a few of us care to think them out step by step. Sara was one of the few, not because she distrusted instinct, but because she knew the comfort of the mind's justification.

Archer must be released from a marriage that was but a lie, a living piece of hypocrisy. This release he would never seek himself; nay, could not by any means that were possible to a sensitive man. She alone could do it for him, she, the woman who had all her life just floated with the stream of circumstance.

For the man of daring speculation was the last man in the world to act. Thought and deed were always fatally divorced in him; even now on his desk was an article on the modern Brahmin class, written to prove that the artist ought to be above pecuniary rewards. Yet nobody would fight more fiercely than Bellew for royalties. In short, he desired to be a hermit, but had no love of roots.

Leaning forward still further she let the air play across her face. With it came the cry of a field-mouse. She held her breath till it ceased, feeling herself caught by the breath of Reality that all her life she had sought to avoid.

Then suddenly she heard it working all around her, the stir of the living will to surpass itself through strife and pain and upward longing. In the sighing wind, in the swaying tree, in her own beating heart as in the death-cry of the vole it sounded. And the whistle of its going was like a thin licking flame in sunny air.

It was unbearable, this realisation of internal upheaval.

She lit a candle and opened the door of her room. Passing on bare feet along the thick carpet of the corridor, she paused outside her husband's door. She felt like the captain of a ship when the barometers register change. Turning the handle of the door, she waited and then from his breathing she knew he was asleep. She slipped behind the screen, shading the light with her hand. He lay with the breath whistling from half-open lips. The long room was in shadow; only the gold filling of a front tooth faintly caught the light.

With the sight of him asleep, head on arm, she felt a wanton. For the first time she realised that release of Archer from the chains that bound him meant—going to her own joy. Memories worked; the sweetness of Italian nights. She had never in her life sought her own. To leave him, to go to a lover! that she could not do. Pain, sorrow, these she would gladly have paid, but not joy, not even to cut away the gangrene that was corrupting his life and hers.

For now she knew what Billy Knyvett had been to her—a quiet resting place where her heart always had its home. Here, or on the other side of death, she could never be lost while in any shape or form he survived. Such trust as this is far above all winds of change.

It struck her, that phrase, "all winds of change." Yet it seemed that *this* change, from pure woman to wanton, even such love as hers could not survive. Passion was the one coin she could not pay down to buy her husband's release.

And at that, the second sleuth-hound caught her, the hound of Pain. Like two borzoi on the steppes they raced on each side of her, Pain and Reality. She could not desecrate the nest of trust and honour that her feeling for Knyvett had created round her—not even to help her husband.

Yet the Reality tore at her heart. She opened the door in haste to escape down the corridor once more. And the hound went with her :—

> "I fled Him, down the nights and down the days ;
> I fled Him, down the arches of the years ;
> I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
> Of my own mind ; and in the midst of tears
> I hid from Him, and under running laughter."

She stood still outside Bellew's room, leaning on the sill. Inadvertently, with a sudden movement, her sleeve swept the candle to the ground and with a clatter it fell on the polished margin of the floor. Holding her breath to hear if it had awakened anyone, she waited and presently a door opened on the landing above. Over the banisters peered a white head with four white rolls of silver on the forehead. It was Elizabeth.

"*Mon Dieu*, Madame," she whispered, coming down, her skirts a-trail, her bare skinny legs like birds' claws, "'tis thou. I hear a noise. I say to myself, 'a robber at last,' and tearing off the curl papers, I arise."

Sara shook with silent laughter. "Elizabeth, thy coquetry is never-dying. The vanity of the thing! To try to charm a burglar with curled locks."

"It was instinctive courtesy. I would not shock, even a robber, with the sight of my bare brow. But Madame is white, ill, sick."

They had reached Sara's door by now and Elizabeth deftly unfastened her mistress's robe and turning back the sheet made her lie down. Now that the excitement was over, long hot shivers shook her between the cool sheets. Elizabeth bent down and began smoothing her forehead with long sweeping strokes.

"Elizabeth," said she at last, "what must it feel like to be a not-respectable woman?"

"*Je m'en fiche*," said Elizabeth, "one eats and drinks and sleeps just the same. And the state is, doubtless, not without its compensations. Bah! what does it matter, that *comme-il-faut?* It is the creation of the messieurs. They like it in the thing they own. It is like a polished skin, a bright eye. But a woman cares for what she is, not for what she is not. To be this, that, or the other, a good manager, a clever mother, a skilled flower-maker, that pleases her. But that she is no free lover; pah! *N'importe*. We all hold something in our hands to fling away; some fling fortune, some good name, some wits. And those who keep all and fling nothing away! Ah, well, *le bon Dieu* weighs them down with their own stupidity."

Elizabeth was right; woman, like man, cannot really be satisfied with the passive virtue of not being. To give, to work, to share; this is her instinct. Reputation, in the sex meaning, is a mere chattel quality and a woman's purity a thing to be questioned only in the slave market. The individual places a higher value on herself than that.

"But Madame is in pain," said Elizabeth, coming back into the room with hot milk. "Tell the old woman, dearie," she pleaded, slipping a hand under Sara's shoulders and coaxing her to drink.

"If I went away, Elizabeth, went away from here, from my husband—what then?"

Elizabeth blinked in the candle-light. Her eyebrows and eyelids were white like those of a mouse, her lined face trembled in its baggy pouches.

"Ah, Madame Sara, Madame Sara," she cried.

"What then?" persisted Sara.

"Eh, but Monsieur Billee he would be happy. It is for this he have waited."

"No, no, no."

"*Ah, oui.* For Monsieur Billee is a man. Madame forgets perhaps."

Sara turned away. It was true, that was what she had forgotten all the time. Her joy was his and nothing in the world could alter that. For that was the true Reality.

"Why has he never—said anything, Elizabeth ?" said she at last.

"He would have Madame Sara choose. He say : 'Let her come and lay her hand in mine.' That is what he wait for. When—something has moved Madame."

"Something has, Elizabeth. He is going down," she nodded on her pillow towards the door. Elizabeth understood—and grimaced.

"Eh, *le mari !*" she exclaimed, "who cares ?"

"But I do, Elizabeth."

The old woman was silent, but when at last her mistress had fallen asleep, she rose, stretched, reached for her candle and went out of the room, softly closing the door behind her. Outside her master's bedroom, she paused :

"G-r-r-r-h," said she, showing her teeth like a savage old dog.

Up under the thatch at Foxholt next day the wind was whistling through keyhole and window cranny ; ivy sprays were lashing themselves with shaggy arms against the mullions and the valley below was blotted out in rain. Everywhere in the garret was the hot smell of apples lying stored in straw along the worm-eaten floor. Bags of seeds, huge marrows hung from the rafters where the rats swung their tails o' nights. Dim with the ivy that tangled the windows, grey and vast and echoing, the place fermented with the mellow scents of autumnal earth. Husked ears of corn tickled the nose of one who bent above the layers of pippins, quarrenders and Blenheim oranges.

Uncle Pip Hawkins placed a hand in the small of his back and stretched himself with a grunt. Opposite him was an altar-like mantelpiece of drab-stone with a delicate wall tracery of plaster wreaths above it. He sat down on a packing-case and began to nod. There was a real pleasure in the sense of being shut off, as in a fortress, high above the world in this hill house, with curtains of rain between it and the nearest dwelling.

Then it seemed that the wind fell, dying away in great booming echoes up the valley; a stillness began, and out of the stillness strange whistling sounds arose. Even the tapping of the ivy had ceased. But the whistling was more insistent with the darkening of the garret; sometimes it was hot and buzzing like the sound of summer flies, sometimes piercing like the shrilling of a sandpiper. In Uncle Pip the terror of sound awoke another sense and he saw that through the closed windows there were floating long, grey, snouted shadows; formless, changing incessantly and yet whistling with the swiftness of their passage through the air.

Small as the withered kernel that rattles in a shell, the soul of the sleeper tried to crouch behind barriers. But in vain. The shapes swept on till they filled him as the mist-wreaths hide the river in a valley. With them came the vision of a wheel, turning backward into the abysm of the past and carrying the dreamer with it. Through flashing torchlights, shadowy forests showed, in whose vague vistas moved things that he desired—to feed the evil in him.

For now he knew himself to be free of that sense of the trouble of the world which makes the conscience of our age. The Man of Sorrows that we all carry within was gone; instead of Him there reigned the Ancient Darkness of primeval lust. Vaguely felt, this background of sorrow had often held him back from word or act that would have added to the sum of evil in the world. Now it was gone and rioting in the joy of his freedom, he visited the empty place in his mind. Yet, after all, there was a little grain of wistfulness, such as one may feel at the deadness which follows old, familiar pain.

But the cruel fancies glanced from brain to limbs, crisping the finger-tips and curling the toes, till he shuffled in his stockinged feet. He was looking over the edge of things. It lasted an age or a second; no matter which.

Then everything merged in the common day. Mr. Hawkins sat up, passing his hand over his eyes and breathing heavily. Feeling old and shaken, he moved towards the head of the staircase that by square landings plunged into the well of the house beneath. He sat down again on the topmost step, holding his head in his hands, for he had suffered a dream change. He had looked in his dream at the Jacob's ladder which might appropriately be the symbol to express the thought of this century, since all its courage to go forward is gathered from the sight of the road already travelled. So that reptilean vestiges may well be taken as a promise of the angelic wings.

Yet, as usual, when we realise the little speck of lighted time in which we stand amid the Ancient Darkness, it was fear that spurred him. His thoughts flew from his wife to Craneham and back again. He took extra precautions against fire that night and sniffed at his ricks suspiciously.

At Craneham next morning he found Mr. Hereford breakfasting with James, the terrier, in attendance. Holding a tangerine orange delicately between finger and thumb, the old man champed his jaws till the pouches of his bearded cheeks wrinkled his eye-sockets. With the motto, "There is no religion higher than truth," carved across the back of his chair, he was discoursing to Anne on cruciform insignia. The cross was a secret masonic mark and every age had been banned or blessed by its taste in holy roods. Thus the present age was paltry, because we are all nailed to such tawdry crosses.

Anne agreed heartily; with feminine taste for detail she applied this to herself, since Sara had gone to London and left her to drive this chariot of senility. Otherwise she was non-committal; politely jesting of course, she replied to Uncle Pip's questions with the self-evident truth that "Those who live longest will see most."

Thereupon he sought out Elizabeth, much as the ancients turned from the processes of reasoning to the decree of the oracle. He found her with elbows in a basin of suds, washing lace. Plunging her arms in soapy water to the elbow she leant on her wrists.

"What will you?" said she at last. "*Voilà*, Monsieur, Madame is a woman; Monsieur did not know that, perhaps?" asked she ironically.

"What do you mean, Elizabeth?"

"Mean! mean! mean!" she shrilled, putting her face closer to his with every word. "Hath not a woman a heart to be filled, hands to be held? See her two nights ago. I hold up the lamp over her, she in her *robe de chambre*. Eyes bright, breast heaving, heart aching. *I* know. And t'other side of the world a man that cares."

"And if that is all she is—a light woman," said he sadly. "Ah, Sara, my dear, my dear."

L'Esprit Gaulois leapt, eyes flashed, fingers snapped.

"And thou, thou, thou, art the first hell-hound to bay at her heels. Bah! So, Monsieur. Take the truth." She held up a sodden finger and thumb and drew them together in a circle. "That is Madame's life, caught in a trap between young man and old. But Madame slip away at last, run, fly—skedaddle. What will you?"

"Good God!" exclaimed Uncle Pip and hurried away to call on Mrs. Knyvett.

But she was in town and so, praying that Sara might be with her, he followed in pursuit. The snouted horrors of his dream, the primeval horrors born of apple-fumes, were the jungle beasts of scandal in his fancy now. To Anne, before he went, he raged like a bear that stands in need of hanging. But all she did was to look straight in his eyes, saying simply:

"Don't weigh Sara's acts with false balances and old-world scales, Uncle Pip. I trust her. Do you do the same."

But he could not. Torn to his depths by love of her and reverence for her womanhood, he failed there. For he would have had her bear physical degradation rather than tarnish her soul's purity. And of that there was no question with Archer.

In Mrs. Knyvett's drawing-room at Hampstead with its white walls dappled with lights and shades from the old trees that looked in at the rounded Georgian windows, he paced up and down. Overhead the ceiling shook with hurried footsteps and presently they fetched him upstairs. There, with the French windows wide open on to the balcony he found Mrs. Knyvett on her couch, with a strap hanging from the ceiling above it.

"Lumbago!" she explained. "I've been ironed and I've been massaged, but I'm held by the hip all the same."

Had she been a Catholic, she would have set up a votive offering to that lumbago in every church in the diocese, so opportune had it proved. And now, though the agony was less, she still lay and blinked at the ceiling, the cornices of which, by the way, were decorated with cupids. Uncle Pip, as he looked at the pink quilt, thought of a biblical personage of the Seven Hills. The *Nation* and the *Spectator* fell off her knees as she held out her hand.

"Never the dock without the nettle, you see," she smiled as he picked them up.

"Yes," she cried, "yes, I've news."

She held out a flimsy paper to him and he took it with hands that shook. It was a cipher cable with the reading by its side. Billy Knyvett had been carried ashore at Punta Arenas, ill. There was a later one: he was slightly better, but ill of fever following chill. Both were signed Westlake.

"Sara sailed by the mail to-day to join him," said Mrs. Knyvett gently.

Trembling like a very old man he sat down. Somehow it was going home to tell his wife that seemed the worst thing to face.

"Not Sara," he said. "Surely not my niece, Sara?"

"Yes, Sara."

He treddled with his feet on the floor. He saw her as a little child playing with the collies in the yard.

"You might have stopped it. You might have gone."

"I wanted her to go. I wanted my son's life to be fulfilled. I swore they shouldn't skulk any longer. Neither of them."

"To sacrifice her like that! To ask her—but there's no use in talking."

"And haven't I flung away something for Billy? Is he the sort of man to be co-respondent in a divorce suit?"

"No, no. An honourable man."

"And she's an honourable woman. Do you think she can't carry her purity through the fire of a court of law as they say the friars carried the Sacred Host in the days when there was faith on the earth? Look you; the law comes from us, from men and women. It didn't tumble down out of heaven. When a marriage bond is a living lie, a lie that degrades both man and woman, then it must be torn asunder. I tell you, she would have borne her starvation all her life if it hadn't been for Archer. Yes, for her husband. He was becoming more degraded, more futile, every day."

She paused, out of breath. "That was the way of it," she said, coughing.

"How will it better Archer?"

"He'll divorce her. She forces him to it. He'll find a mate, a true one. He's made all in one piece like a woman. One lie in his life and he feels spoilt, ruined, dirty. Oh, I had it all out with her. She sat there where you are, struggling, beating her wings like a butterfly in a net. She thought of everyone but herself; of Archer's house built on sand; of Billy's chance of public life gone. I tell you she'd have gone more willingly to gaol than to my son's arms, the sweet Puritan. Suffering she could understand, could bear, but the suffering that came with passion was a stain."

"You think so? You're not telling me this to comfort me, stuffing me with lies?"

"I'm telling you the simple truth, Philip Hawkins. And all the while my boy's perhaps dying over there."

Her face worked and Uncle Pip's brain was reeling.

"Oh, Lord," said he at last, "thank heaven I had my romance before this century. To run away with another man because you love your husband!"

"Love!" snapped Mrs. Knyvett. "What does that mean? As many different things as there are men and women. And marriage! Good lack, the best marriage is the one that promises the best births. And I don't use the word in the physical sense only. But I put my money on what your niece and my son will give the world. Though I don't mean babies—only."

"Madame," said he sadly, "what you mean is quite beyond me. I feel as though I had been standing for twenty-four hours on a steam thresher."

When he was gone she lay back and wept.

"Oh, Billy, Billy, have I done right? or have I injured you? My dear son, my dear, dear son."

All her life she had been of the company of free souls, of those who go on long voyages seeking fresh horizons. Onward into uncharted seas, she pushed with the younger generations pressing on her heels. Hard enough is this task for scientist or thinker; but far harder is it to fling into the crucible of change the tables of the law, to recognise them, not as made of stone, but of metal that can be recast. All her fifty-eight years rose to crush her courage that night while Uncle Pip was travelling westward once more.

In the morning Aunt Hatty received him with tea and comfort. She would have added a footstool but he damned it furiously and told her not to fuss. Then the story came out.

"Well, my dear," said she, "I'd not fret my gizzard, if I were you. Just think what we should have felt if anybody had come between us fifty year agone. And if you can't rest nor sleep till you've got the particular thing you're set on, I reckon it's a sign the Lord meant you to have it."

"But her good name!" he exclaimed.

"She'll value it the more when she gets it back. That's the only way for a woman to learn the vally of anything. I'm sure I never knew what a treasure that new wringer was till that silly maid we had last year went and broke it."

"Good God, Hatty! Isn't there a sense of great and small in women's minds? 'Wringers and reputations,' saith she."

"Now, my dear, if you were up against this—that you'd either got to set folks talking by doing what seemed the right thing, or keep 'em quiet by sticking to the wrong, what would you choose ? "

" Doing the right thing ! But it's the whole moral code for women, the Decalogue, that you're calling in question, Hatty."

" Naught but a malkin set up by the men folk to scare the crows off women, Pip. 'Tis but a thing of sticks and rags. And we're beginning to know it. T'other day I saw a scarecrow where a bird had built its nest in the arm. 'Tis but a sham, after all. And that's a fact. Birds and women have got a wonderful taste for the real thing, Pip."

" When I hear you talk like this, Hatty, I'm thankful you never had a daughter. Thankful."

" And I might as well have had one, if you're going on worrying about Sara as if she was your own," retorted she. " But there's no sense nor reason in men. If the Almighty had meant you to have the worrit of a daughter, he'd have given you one, wouldn't he ? "

He was out of earshot. But weeks elapsed before he turned the apples in the garret. His experience there had fully convinced him of what he had suspected before —the indecency of poring beneath the surface.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FOOL OF QUALITY ; IN THIS BILLY PIPES AND SARA DANCES

MEANWHILE time and space, factors overlooked in Mrs. Knyvett's calculations, were placing Sara in a distinctly humorous situation. For, as proved by Peter's cables, Billy was rapidly on the way to recovery and standing in no need whatever of the ministrations of any lady with the lamp.

Yet Sara did not care, for she was learning the taste of freedom ; always before she had seen the world through a fog of relatives. Now the width of it, as she walked the deck of the mail-boat unfettered at last, was sufficient consolation for that terror of a lost reputation which apparently places the heart in the pit of the stomach. A handful of folk in tradition-ridden England might condemn her, but were there not Scotch settlers in the Falkland Isles making a living out of sheep pastured on tussock-grass? Even the sight of her husband's books in the ship's library brought a smile, for she had been in contact with an interesting personality; at this distance the peccadilloes of 'the knave of hearts' were amusing. It was her father's selfishness that left the deepest mark; she recalled it with a stinging blush as one may a personal solecism, for our relatives are near enough to us to insult our self-love by the exhibition they make of themselves before the world, but not near enough to glorify us by their achievements; thorns in the flesh, not feathers in the cap, they may curse but not bless.

But the sea had its way with her; she was the better able to read between the lines of Peter's letter which awaited her at Rio:—

"Before we sighted Cape Virgins Billy fell ill. I knew it, Cole knew it, but he wouldn't give in. For, except Bodinar, there wasn't a man aboard to take the vessel up the Straits—but him. And Bodinar was mostly drunk. Of course he ought to have been in irons, would have been anywhere but on the *Pendragon*. But—that's just Billy, you know. He'll never force an easy way for himself. If it comes, well and good, but if it doesn't, it may stay away and be damned to it. Put him up slick against a wall that he's got to get through and he'll never loosen a brick of it. He'll only ram with his head and either break it—or his own skull."

Sara laughed, remembering a Knyvett ancestor who had died in the Inquisition rather than confess himself—what he was—a Catholic, preferring to go to the stake rather than be forced to tell the truth.

"Off the Virgins," continued Peter, "whitish grey cliffs and seals playing in the surf, all as peaceful as a Sunday School. Anchored there. And then the wind shifted and drove us southwards. That's my notion of hell now—tacking, always tacking, while you wait for the slant that's to carry you up the neck of a bottle. We saw the ice-blink—and got pretty near the ice in field. Those are times when you can *feel* danger. Day after day it went on and Billy getting more and more like a death's head. And never so much as a cat's-paw to show a flaw in the wind.

"My God!

"Billy'd locked his clinical thermometer in his cabin drawer, I found. Better not know where you are, I suppose. And always between him and the green seas aft a great rolling globe. Talked of it, he did, afterwards in delirium.

"At last it came: 'all hands stand by to wear ship,' and we rode her in on the flood and at change of the moon. Kelp at Cape Possession, ruffling the sea like a shoal of under-water porpoises. Tide like a race in the First Narrows. See us pully-hauling yards at the daybreak. Ho—io—io! Billy crowded on the canvas till Cole damned his eyes. Anchored in Gregory Bay. Out again, but driven back to our moorings. Then the Second Narrows, sighted Cape Negro and dropped anchor in Laredo Bay. Sealers there. Got a pilot, a lean, hungry chap.

"'Chilianos?'" said I to him, when he boarded us from the *Mary Rose*.

"'No damn fear!' says he, and I found he was a Norwegian. By that time we'd to hold Billy in his berth and we came into Sandy Point as they'd seen many a vessel before, Irish pennants everywhere, fore tops'le in ribbons and Bodinar dazed—been on the bend for a week. Billy doesn't know, but the tug from Glasgow's a derelict. Bodinar let her stave her side in and left her leaking like a sieve, for he'd never caulked her seams, though he'd got enough marine glue to stop the leaks of an old three-decker. Done purposely, of course. Bodinar doesn't want to go up Smyth's Channel—or to put his nose into Coronel. We've got to watch him day and night, or he'd give us the slip, or put a knife into us in the good old way.

"Billy's betwixt and between now—as to health. Therefore we've not told him yet that you're coming. He mustn't be jolted."

Sara laid down the letter; she was, it appeared, coming at the wrong time. Yet she could not turn back now. And two days later the mail-boat entered the roadstead of Punta Arenas.

Catboats and schooners strained at their moorings against the tug of a sou'westerly gale. The furrows in the wake of moving vessels, the sun-dappled waves and ruffling winds were quivering incessantly behind the black derrick-arms of the liners loading wool from the hulks in the offing. Faint, clear, and infinitely remote, hung in air the blue peaks of the Cordilleras.

The street of cobblestones by the landing-stage, the wood and iron of the two-storeyed Kosmos Hotel, the long passage piled with luggage, the courtyard at the side, black in mud and dotted with ducks, poultry and horses: these things seemed to Sara an interminable nightmare, like the winding labyrinths of a dream. She stopped before the parrot's cage in the passage and stood holding up her fingers to allure the sidling bird, as though she had crossed the Atlantic to play with a parrot. Peter humoured her pretence.

"He swears in German, Spanish and English," said he.

But Sara was only listening to the blood in her veins; her pulses thudded now like race-horse hoofs on the sand.

"He knows I'm here?" she asked, nodding towards Billy's door.

"We told him yesterday," said Peter.

The air was growing dark and presently across the sky of the courtyard a few flakes of snow fluttered slowly. But still Sara stood nursing her finger where the bird had nipped her. At last Peter moved, opened the door to the left and with his hand under her elbow, half lifted her across the threshold.

Films of dreams, instead of the hotel furniture, seemed to crowd the room. Like the distant tolling of a bell-buoy across the water she heard the blood ringing in her ears. His voice awoke her.

"Sara, Sara, it *is* you?" he cried, holding out his hands.

They sat down side by side, but in an instant's flash she knew that this was not the man she had come to meet.

"Billy!" she exclaimed, wonderingly.

He smiled and then her words came tumbling out like pebbles from a shaken bag. "You were ill. Mrs. Knyvett could not come. So she—sent me."

"'A providential attack,' she calls it," he smiled, "in her letter—which I've only just seen, by the way."

"Let's pretend," she said suddenly, "let's pretend it's just a tea-party and not a life and death thing."

"Put your head in a bag and say you can't be seen? No, Sara, I can't do that."

Then, with a flash of the eyes, he took it all in; the grey shimmer of the trailing gown she had insisted on staying to put on, much to Peter's surprise, the new current of life she brought with her. Her spirits, answering his, went up with a bound.

"You dear," she cried suddenly and embarrassed him terribly, for the waiter had entered the room with a tea-tray.

After tea she sat leaning back in her chair watching the snowflakes that fluttered white for a second across the window and vanished on the other side. Over what leagues of sea and tempest-torn hills had they not passed to reach this lighted space? On an errand that seemed as fruitless as her own, for she was vainly trying to force her way into the innermost recesses of his mind. And all the time there sang in her ears, the rhyme:—

"There was a fleet that went to Spain,
When it got there, it came back again."

Still the wordless battle went on, she praying for entrance, he as constantly refusing. At last, noisily drawing back the window curtains on their rings, he tore one and swore. Sara turned, but he avoided her glance and sat watching the smoke rise from his cigarette. He was wishing he knew her as well as, say, Diana of the Crossways or Sue Bridehead. But one never knows a living woman like that. For women are like the earth; they only yield their secrets to the masters.

Suddenly she sighed; the sound broke something hard in him and his arms closed round her. So they held each other, passing away together into the depths where two seek to become one. When he placed a hand on her breast, she held it there, and when she sank back in her chair, he knelt beside her. She laughed and set a seal of kisses on his bent neck. Billy listened to the sound as one awaking from a nightmare may revel in the homely tinkling of the breakfast cups.

"Billy, Billy," she exclaimed, "let me into your mind," and thus unconsciously made the great confession that passion is but the striving of two imprisoned souls. "Oh, Billy, don't be so hard to me."

She all but shook him in her energy.

"It does *hurt* you so to speak, doesn't it?" said she. "What is it now? Is it a new version of 'I could not love thee, dear, so much'? Is it Lovelace come to life again?"

So she pelted him with words, hating herself the while and despising him for parochial morality. How extraordinary it was that an intelligent man should be so conventional as to be bound by a merely national code of morality. Why, if he had been an American—anger blazed in her suddenly, for her emotional temperature was going up. She felt like a total abstainer with a thimbleful inside him. She had set out to lose the world for him —and he treated her like a Magdalen. The harsh word pleased her immensely. She felt like a fakir throwing the lash across his own shoulders.

"Is it the shadowy third?" she asked. It was astonishing how under his silence the spirit of the catechist arose in her.

"The shadowy third?" he repeated.

"Yes; the people you're thinking of who might follow our example. For no Englishman is ever moral for his own sake. It's always for somebody else. He wouldn't do as he liked, not even on a desert island. For the sake of the birds and the fishes, you know. That's what Archer always says."

At the mention of Bellew his face changed.

"Oh, Archer isn't the shadowy third," she exclaimed. "Couldn't be, because it was for his sake I—bolted."

She held her head up. "No, don't imagine that you have a monopoly of conscience. For I can assure you I shouldn't be here if I saw the faintest bit of wrong in it. But you—your manner is detestable."

"I knew you had a temper, but——"

"Billy, how can you? When I've come and it cost me so much——"

"But just now you said it didn't cost you——"

"You are perfectly insufferable. I don't know you, I've never seen you before," she cried.

"Come here, Sara," he said, catching her hands and pulling her up to him, while her eyelids fluttered, tears fell and lips worked, "don't be a damn fool."

He bent forward and stopped her lips with his own.

"That's better," he said, when she snuffled, sobbed and finally hid her face. He congratulated himself on his skill in surgery as he contemplated the back of her head.

"Comfy?" he asked.

A nod answered him. She looked up suddenly.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I knew it. I knew you were smiling in a highly superior manner. I saw a vision of the corners of your lips. Don't! don't."

His smile broadened.

"It's so deadly serious," she cried.

"By Jove, it is," said he. "You know you oughtn't to be here at all, Sara."

Anger darted again. "Then let me go," she cried, struggling.

"Stop it," he said. "You know I want you, want you, want you."

Much comforted, she relapsed with a sigh; after all, he had, as a divine would have put it, the roots of the matter in him.

"Why were you so queer when I came?" she asked at length. With his pipe alit, he sat, teeth gripping it, gazing over her head into space.

"Because," he said gravely, "I wanted you to come to a man worth coming to. I'm not, at present. I've been a slacker, a hopeless slacker. Oh, yes, I know what was at the back of my mother's brain. She thought that if I got this job of ours over I'd settle down to the real business of life."

" I don't understand," she said, sitting up.

" See here, it's like this," he answered, " a man who loves a woman, Sara, wants her to have the best he can give. Wants her to come to him without a shadow."

" There is no shadow—not in my mind."

" But there is in mine. There is more than a shadow over it all. Would you have acted as you have if you had not been rushed into it ? First there was my illness and your fear of what might be happening to me. Ever since I knew you were coming I've thought of nothing else."

She freed herself and, pacing up and down the room, tried to face the facts. At first only his egotism struck her. How could she go back ? What construction would her world put on it all ? Of that apparently he never thought, nor would she remind him of it, for if a man will only take a woman on the highest terms conceivable to him, why, then she must crane her neck to look up at him. Yet she almost longed for the days when a man's relationship with a woman was not so much stuff o' the conscience with him, when she was just the part of his life he put outside when the work began. She regretted, for a second, the gay lovers among the great men who carved out the future, men who loved and forgot their women as easily as they flung aside their coats. It is still the Latin way to-day, where love is pleasure and marriage as much a concession to custom as cards on the *jour de l'an.*

Yet he must be made to see her view.

" Long ago," she said, threading her fingers together and looking down on them, " I knew a woman whose husband was unfaithful to her. Again and again she forgave him and took him back. And she did right, for she shared his thoughts, all the best of him. It was only the lowest that he gave to—those others."

" But what about ' those others ' ? How did it affect them ? "

"I don't know. Nobody does, you see."

There was a silence.

"When soul and spirit are one, body doesn't matter. I've never been Archer's like that. Never. So I've never been his wife at all. Ceremony! What's ceremony got to do with it? What ceremony can fuse two metals that no chemical power can join? No. It's the burning together that does it. I've never been his wife. I'm free. Before ever he—what they call, married me, he'd shared his best with another woman. She loved him. She cared, she has watched him, her thoughts have been busy with him all these years. And he? What were his words? 'I've never seen another woman as I saw her'?"

It was a queer confession, but to the martyr in his ecstasy even cross-making seems a branch of celestial carpentry.

"But to you this is all wrong. And every touch just now was—wicked. Yet all these years I've trusted you, felt I only had to come and you would be ready for me. But all the time I've been mistaken, it seems."

"That isn't true, Sara, and you know it. But what you have told me only makes it the more impossible. You acted out of hatred, repulsion—perhaps momentary."

"You're making it hard for me to forgive you," she said in a low voice.

Beaten, thrown back on herself, she wondered if she could face—England. Hatred seized her for the man who put her to this test of strength.

"I'm very tired," she said, "I think I'll go to my room."

"But you understand me?"

"Thoroughly," she said, "though you've set me rather a hard problem."

She laughed and he looked doubtful—as well he might. She felt, indeed, that in his day he must have eaten husks with the Gadarenes and paid his worship to the god of the earth that dwells in dark places; he was so afraid of shadows. It was the queer kinship of high passion and low hunger that made him scent a weakness.

Or so she read him. But at any rate his standard of honour should be kept up, though she had to nail it to her own good name, for this refusal of the easy way was as inbred in him as a pointer's method of earning a livelihood.

In her own room the title of her husband's last book flashed into her mind; was she not "between two servitudes"? Never in all her life had she been independent. Before marriage she had been her father's tool and now—think as she would of Billy's scruples, judge them noble as she did, was he not treating her as a thing for whom decisions must be made? And was he not right, for had she not shown her inability to stand alone?

The question answered itself; Billy had judged like a free man. But she had not. Flying from one man to the other, she was tossed like a shuttlecock. His idealism was the fruit of freedom. Her idealism had never been born, for she had never been free.

Softly she widened the space between the doors. Neat, fresh, intent, he came out of his room and glanced in her direction, though he could not tell that she was watching him. So they stood with a barrier of austerity between them; she caught her breath in a sob and the hungry years fed on her heart. Then his eyes shifted downwards to the writing-table and half absently sitting down, he took up a flimsy sheet of paper, cable or telegram evidently. Presently he unfolded a map and bending over it, traced a line with a pencil. She could only see the top of his head. What was it that engrossed him?

The rustle of her dress betrayed her. He held out his hand to draw her towards him.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"One of the most wonderful things in the world—a plan of the great West Coast railway, the zigzag line that carries trains right across the Andes up into the line of eternal snows."

Then in a torrent of eager words he spoke of inclines, gradients, of mountainous peaks of débris piled by the Incas in their irrigation works, of the line that was to open up the mines of Peru, the nitrates of Chili. "A man's fallen ill, one of the engineers," he said with a jerk. "They've asked me to slip into his place."

There was an implied question in his tone.

"You will accept," she said confidently. For she was minded not always to remain between two servitudes.

"Dearest, dearest," he cried, looking up at her. The words sounded like thanks and that hurt her more than anything. Their two minds had gone out into the darkness, had questioned one another—and brought back the answer. She would not hinder his work.

Then Peter came in to dinner. Sara watched him curiously; brown and lean as he was, even the loose grey shirt, the easy gestures of his body made him seem another man. He had picked himself free, as she must do. But after all he had only been fettered by civilisation; she was in thrall to a deeper bondage.

He began to talk of Anne.

"We'll not go into a church," said he with a twinkle, "where she'll have to tell a lie. Anne! Fancy Anne obeying me! Why should she? You know in this matter of mating we've gone further on the wrong road than in any other single human venture. And it's bedrock, mating is. But what we've got to learn is that marriage was made for man and woman, not woman and man for marriage. That's about the size of it, I opine. And any church that goes about saying, as a bishop did t'other day, that a woman mustn't be released from marriage though her husband drive her to the streets——"

"Had better put its shutters up," chimed in Billy. "But the English are afraid to think. They've been so long in blind, unquestioning obedience to a Book. It'll take 'em a long time to recover from the injury they've done to their brain."

"Yes," said Peter, "an Englishman with the Bible inbred in him—or rather what he imagines is the Bible—always looks at a new idea as though it were a demon come hot from hell."

"For," added Billy, "the strongest things in a man are the instincts that come down to him from his ancestors' graves."

Suddenly Sara was afraid, since from the graves of *her* ancestors had sprung an instinct. Neither man, she fancied, would have talked thus freely before her had she remained a conventional woman. She was afraid of freedom. Even the way in which Peter moved, threw his limbs about, puffed smoke through his nose offended her; she felt inadequately clothed for hill air.

It was absurd; but no beliefs are stronger than those for which there is not a jot of proof—from faith in the divine right of kings to the efficacy of an upright poker against the grate. Again for a second Sara regretted the swash-buckling days when lovely woman was toasted—and forgotten almost as quickly as the glasses that were smashed in her honour. Then she recoiled from her own thoughts, for Archer Bellew was a throwback to those days before the flood. Was he not nicknamed "the knave of hearts"?

When she returned to her room after dinner, she found a woman kneeling before the fire to replenish it. The sight of Mrs. Bodinar was a fresh irritation, since Bessie stood for the web of circumstance which had entangled them all. A mood of voluble explanation fell upon Sara; she began eagerly to say that Mr. Knyvett's mother, being too ill to come, had sent her as deputy. Mrs. Bodinar preserved a silence that sounded accusatory.

"But Mr. Knyvett doesn't need me now. You've nursed him so splendidly," said Sara.

"And so I ought to," cried the woman, "with my man playing the fool, same as he did. And him a seaman, one of the best. 'Twas all he had, his seamanship. And now that's gone, too."

"But you did your best."

"My best! What's a woman's best? If I'd worked my fingers to the bone to get us out of the mess Sim's brought to us, I couldn't have done it."

"But you were not responsible," began Sara.

The woman cut her short savagely.

"When a woman's man does ill, it stings worse'n if she'd done it herself. And when he does well, she feels 'tis his doing, not hers. All sting and no comfort. That's marriage for a woman."

Sara sat down and, leaning her head on her hand, gazed at the fire. The peering eyes watched her closely. Then she began to unpack, laying linen in the drawers from the cabin trunk.

"Don't take out much," said Sara, "I'm going back by the next boat."

This speech was meant as a challenge; Mrs. Bodinar took it as such.

"Don't you do anything of the sort," cried she. "My Lord! what a mort o' things I've seen going wrong this last year or two. And here am I talking, that ought to keep my mouth shut."

"What is it, Mrs. Bodinar? Say what you want to say." Sara laughed and, crossing the room, laid a hand on the woman's shoulder. "And what's he done, after all? Your husband, I mean," she cried. "Only brought Mr. Knyvett across the Atlantic by telling a few lies perhaps——"

"And showed hisself a coward. And Sim hasn't anything *but* his seamanship, he that was so looked up to. That once saw himself so big, too."

"But your children?" asked Sara. "Don't they make up to you?"

"Chillern! That's the worst of all. I try to forget I've got 'em. They're no great shakes. And they're my doing, for I bore them with the bad thing over me."

The old furtive glance began and Sara wondered if the woman were sane.

"Yes, I'm right enough," said Mrs. Bodinar, answering her glance. "'Tis only that I've got the sight. My mother and my mother's mother had it afore me. Just a change in your eyesight and you can see what's all around us, what others don't see. And then there's sleep and dreams."

"Fortune-telling, you mean?"

The woman's pride flashed. "Ay, they all knowed Bessie Bodinar. Come from miles round, they would.

I've had so many as three motor-cars come to my door in one week. I'm a Crowte and the Crowtes all have it. And there's my chillern born with *that* going on all round 'em. I've lived so much on the other side that some days I'd be glad to see a butcher's shop again or Mr. Beavis cutting bacon. Fancy chillern coming in the midst of all that. They've a deal to do with birth, they on the other side—always. And I didn't keep good company, there. So my chillern's poor trade. They're my work and it's bad."

The strange ideas arrested Sara in the bewilderment of her own choice.

"Most folks," continued Mrs. Bodinar, "be wound about and about with their own doings by the time they'm middle-aged. 'Tis like silkworms, all tied up with what's come out of their own inside."

"I suppose one can escape?"

"You can bite your way out. That's all you can do."

"Children must be the worst cocoon."

"So they be. 'Twas through them I lost my hold on Simon. We'd worked together more like friend and friend than man and wife till I'd got to stay home to mind the chillern. That spoilt it all. A man grows away from his wife that way. A man didn't ought to be left to hisself."

Mrs. Bodinar reminded Sara of a person explaining that without churches all the world is devoid of "the means of grace."

"Ought I to bite my way out?" she asked suddenly.

"I reckon that's what you've done, haven't 'ee?"

The rough words shook Sara into anger. Bessie understood.

"You're doing naught but harm to your man. That's all there is to it. I've seen 'en—a chap that wants somebody to think for 'en, eat for 'en, breathe for 'en and put herself all round 'en. He'd better get one that can. You can't."

Sara was silent. She resented short ways applied to herself.

"Go and tell Mr. Westlake," she said curtly, "that I want to go out and see the town."

Mrs. Bodinar smiled slyly and went on her errand. In a few minutes Sara was out of the hotel and on the quay where Peter joined her.

"I say," he cried, "it's lateish, you know."

She stamped her foot. "Peter," she cried, "do be quiet. If you don't want to come, I can go alone. It's still nearly daylight."

"Of course, if you want—" he said, and followed meekly between the rows of flat, snow-covered roofs. Four roads led through the town up from the waterside to the plaza deep in black mud. The lighted doors of the *Teatro Municipal* attracted Sara. She felt the need of something that might make her forget the nerves fretted now to the fragility of thin, rust-eaten wires, the brain behind the forehead that had grown empty it seemed, and bloodless. The two went in.

The room was coffin-shaped and from the sides the evening half-light filtered between the dull red pilasters, mingling grey, silvery tones with the orange of the footlights. Above the heads of the audience, Chilians, Norwegians, Germans and English, wide-mouthed angels blew trumpets towards the apex of the roof.

Outside the sleet-laden wind from Terra del Fuego churned the waters of the Straits to fury. And only a few years ago a price was set upon the heads of natives in Punta Arenas, those same natives who have been made by missionary zeal the victims of one of the silliest crimes ever committed by civilisation. Peter had been talking of it, as they walked up the street, of the pious fools who taught the Yahgans the wickedness of self-defence and so handed their women over to the bestial ways of whaling crews, besides shutting their children up to die of consumption by scores. Rage burnt in Sara as she thought of all the helpless made to suffer in order that meddlers may feel themselves virtuous. Was she not like a canoe Indian, tied to the stake of the world's opinion in order that none might be harrowed by the sight of a creature living its own life?

She was glad to watch the stage. The scene might have been taken from an ancient German woodcut, with its gnarled and twisted trees half hiding among their branches a huge stork's nest. Every reed, every twig stood out boldly.

The audience chattered like a perching flock of gulls, then they craned forward. Among the trees was a dancer, a woman. Lithe, lean and swarthy, her slanting eyes seemed more Eastern than Western, yet the whites of them flashed ; she was no Japanese, but Chilian probably. So close she kept to the tree branches that it seemed a nature dance, as true to its surroundings as the protective mimicry of birds and insects. Then they saw she had a companion, a lad whose thin flanks appeared half stiff with fear for all the wiriness of his young limbs. The two danced noiselessly, the boy seeking vainly to elude his shadow, the woman. Now wheeling close to the ground like a bird on the seashore, now gliding like a moonbeam between the trees, she forestalled every movement. Faint lights flickered through the wood and went out ; pale beams flamed along the floor like the streaks of rosy colour when the shallow tide creeps over sandstone ; dull greens flashed, the green of weed-clogged estuaries ; the blue faded into the grey flecked with purple that marks the distant hills. The wood seemed to be contracting to bring the woman nearer to her prey.

The tide to the moon, the flower to the wind, the leaning palm tree to her mate, the fish in the sea, the wheeling birds in air, the call of that which is strength in weakness, source of the world's beauty and cruelty—they had all gone back, Bradford wool-buyers, Chilians, swarthy greyhounds with native blood in them, pure blooded Norsemen and Teutons, back into the gulf of half-forgotten things, each one a living sepulchre of the past. Old things stirred in atom and fibre.

In the midst of the roar of applause Sara rose and slipped away, Peter following. Outside, the noise of the surf came over the roofs ; the cobbles gleamed wet in the streets against the planks of wood that cut off the muddy sidewalks from the streets. The edge of the sea was outlined by a white line of foam. Lights swayed from the mastheads of the anchored vessels. Far away, unseen, were the desolate hills of Fire Land.

"What does it all mean?" asked Sara.

"Nobody knows," said Peter, "but——"

"But what?"

"We're going on," said he, "we're not going back."

Sara was silent. She wanted a more confident answer than that.

"Do you want to fall out," asked he, "out of the procession?"

"No," she said, and then again, more confidently, "no."

The next instant she laughed at herself for the impression the incident had made on her. For what was it, after all? An ugly woman fooling in a dancing booth before a crowd of seamen and commercial travellers, and following that, a glimpse of the sea. Yet—it was very much a part of the procession all the same.

Lying wakeful in her bed that night, Sara heard a footstep pacing up and down in the sitting-room. She got up, and slipping on a gown, waited for a moment shivering. It was unbearable, that sense of patient endurance. Softly turning the key in the lock, she pushed the door ajar.

"Ah," said Billy, "I was wondering whether you were lying there awake. Come."

He threw another log on the fire and pulled forward a chair for her. Leaning an arm along the mantelpiece, he looked down on her.

"Child," he asked tenderly, "have I hurt you? You feel I have failed you? Is it not so?"

She roused herself.

"It felt like that at first," she said, "but I was wrong."

"I love you, Sara, never better than now."

"I know."

"But the other way is the easier," he smiled.

"Yes—the other way."

Then she spoke of the visit to the *Teatro Municipal*.

"That—and this," she cried, holding out her hands, "this feeling of ours that makes us dread even the faintest shadow of wrong on what ties us! Oh, Billy, what does it all mean?" It was the question she had asked of Peter.

"You understand then—what I feel?" he asked.

"I see it through your eyes," she answered. "I could not bear it else. But that in the theatre—and this?"

"We know both," he said, holding her hands on his shoulders. "But we have come to the ultimate outpost, have we not?"

"Love?" she whispered.

He nodded.

> "And shall my sense pierce love,
> The last relay and ultimate outpost of eternity?"

Then ashamed of self-revelation, he grew embarrassed.

She could not fully understand, for indeed she was in pain, but she dreaded the worse suffering she might have had to bear. And shining like a clear star was her trust in his honour.

"But what will you do, dear heart?" he asked at length.

So she tried to tell him—how she must feel the earth firm beneath her feet, must work and earn a place for herself.

"I'll be something worth while, even yet," she cried. "I have my music. I've a leverage, something to sell that people want. At the worst I can teach."

Yet the man in him rebelled for an instant at the idea of her making a niche for herself. He wanted to make one for her.

"But," said she briskly, "I don't in the least give in from my main position. I did right to leave Archer. I'll not acquiesce in a marriage that ought not to have been. The only thing to do in this world if you've made a mistake is to try and put it right. And perhaps we can use that ridiculous back door into common sense allowed by the English law—restitution of conjugal rights. Would your recognition of me as a possible Mrs. Billy Knyvett be satisfied by that?" she laughed.

Then he surprised her, showing that behind Jacob there still lurked Ishmael.

"If," he said quietly, "at the end of a year you still feel as you do now, I shall come and take you."

"Billy!" she gasped.

"Sara!" he exclaimed angrily, "will you never understand? What is mine I will take. But I must be sure it is mine. I will have no forcing of your hand. My mother carried you off your feet. So did Bellew. So did my illness. Come to me with all your soul your own, and——"

There was no need to end the sentence.

"I shall go away at once," she whispered. "I'm going back by the next boat."

"No, no," he cried, "not so soon as that."

"Yes," she persisted. "We will not fail each other, Billy."

So they entered on their comradeship.

As they clasped hands across the writing-table, the sketch-plan of the Andean railway lay between them. In Sara's eyes it stood for all that linked, yet separated them. For it is not only the red-gold dawn nor Sirius in his glory that keeps us from the gutter now; it is the high tradition of our race. Shall a man still go untouched by the fact that one of his blood once saw the spring as Botticelli saw it, or looked at a woman and found the Mona Lisa?

Something of this Sara said.

"Culture!" sneered Billy. "What's Hecuba to me?"

Then they both forgot, for he had crossed the room and caught her up. The year's separation outbulked for them the dog-star and all the galaxy of pictures in the Louvre.

Yet he understood the principle of bridge-building very well. Only he hated words.

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CHAPTER XV

PACTOLUS, "WHOSE FOAM IS AMBER AND WHOSE GRAVEL, GOLD"; IN THIS IS SOLVED THE MYSTERY OF SIMON BODINAR'S ENCHANTED CIGARETTES

A FORTNIGHT later the steamship *Coloso*, hired in Punta Arenas to go up Smyth's Channel, was well on her way to Bodinar's Cove.

"Let her rip," said Billy, keen to get the job done, and the Norwegian skipper had no objection. Then, at Port Famine, the sudden slowing down of the engines made everybody's head buzz; a motor-boat from Punta Arenas was overhauling the tug.

"The British consul's launch," exclaimed Knyvett, handing the glass to Peter.

To the south stretched the curving channels of Magdalen Sound, running like a thread into the heart of the Fuegian hills. The shifting wind blew alternate cloud and sunlight across the snowy summits that jut from the blackness of deep, tree-covered valleys. Above Mount Sarmiento, its snow-covered rock ridges a dazzling mass of streaky gold, hung a ragged curtain of mist.

The motor-boat came alongside the *Coloso*; Billy's brows puckered as he read the dispatch:

"The man Pycroft about whom you were enquiring is now reported as wanted by the Chilian government and is supposed to be in hiding at Sandy Point. Has certainly left Coronel where he was last employed at expert work in the glass factory. I enclose an official copy of the photograph which is being circulated."

"Wanted," said Billy. "Gun-running, perhaps, but it narrows the net round him. Anyway, it saves us Coronel."

The photograph showed a man whose low forehead and set-back ears gave him a " bullish " look. His cheeks hung in folds that curtained the framework of the face rather than moulded it—a fibrous, hairy fellow with a mouth like a trap.

" You think you'll have to trace him, then," asked Peter.

" I haven't got to the bottom of Bodinar—yet," answered Billy. " And if Bodinar doesn't pan out well, Pycroft must."

Once aboard the *Coloso* the seaman had given them another surprise. Alert, keen, ready, he showed his knowledge of ports and harbours to be greater than that of the skipper who had spent ten years steaming up and down these Straits. He was facing the very same game that he had funked all across the Pond. Only now he was playing it.

It was Bessie who failed this time, for the desolation of grey, immemorial ages was fretting her nerves to thin wire. It was not many hours later that the storm burst.

She sat up in her bunk, for the cabin was suddenly filled with darkness as though the *Coloso* were passing through a tunnel. Looking out of the port-hole she saw that they were just beneath the shadow of overhanging cliffs. The lead line was going and the siren whistling, for the tug was seeking anchorage for the night. The grey evening light threw a pallid gleam over the sea. Mrs. Bodinar wiped her face, for the air of the cabin was close.

" How'll it all end ? " she cried. " And what the devil's afore us ? "

The old human weariness overcame her, the longing to push open the door of the future and peep in. She eyed her big, corded tin box and sidled, tortoise-like, away from it. To Mrs. Bodinar that box was the bottle which the toper places on the shelf—to remind him of his strength.

She opened the door softly and peeped up the gangway ; just outside stood the companion stairs and the cabin doors swung slightly ; from the engine room came the sound of hissing steam. She went back, knelt down and opened the box. Burrowing, she flung out layers of clothes; then came a square inlaid work-box, a picture under glass of the Monument, a pile of photographs in plush frames and finally, a bit of wax all ridged by her thread, a reminder of the time when she used to make Bodinar's small-clothes. She sat back on her heels and saw in fancy the sunlight glisten on the two brass buttons at the back of the trousers; homesickness rose in her like a bitter wave.

Then she looked up; her husband was watching her from the doorway of the cabin which he shared with Scantlebury, the assayer they had taken on at Sandy Point.

" You devil," she cried, " you lazy, loafing devil to bring me out here—here where I've got the horrors day and night. And I know I'll never see a Devon shorthorn again nor eat a bit of home-cured bacon. I shall die out here. I know I shall. And 'twill be you that done it. They'll heave me overboard, here where 'tis death-cold and never give me Christian burial."

Hysteria raged.

" I never asked 'ee to come. 'Twas but your own cussed curiosity, the thing you got from the old lady, back along, my dear."

" The ungrateful toad," cried she, " and to me, me, that followed 'en to the ends of the earth, saying where thou goest, I will go."

" A man don't *want* it said to 'en. Where'd be the British Navy, where'd be the Mercantile Marine if every man wanted that said to 'en? Dry up, Bessie."

" I'll not. You miserable, lying cheat that have been the ruin of me for forty year, that have lived on me and taken the food out of your children's mouths. And you with your waistcoat pocket full of gravel, and your bag full of sand! You'll come to the scaffold, if you don't mind what you're about."

" Scaffold! saith-a," quoth Simon truculently; " they don't hang for sheep-stealing now. And do I look like an Oliver Grumble to perish on the scaffold?" he added, going over to look at his hirsute countenance in the hanging glass.

"I did go it a bit in Sandy Point—women, wine and the rest of it. But when I want a thing, 'tis away to go for it, straight, with me. Can't bear to wait." He was sparring vigorously with clenched fists at an unseen foe.

"But when I see things spin, I'm like a daisy." He was rotating now in clumsy imitation of a ballroom couple.

"Give us a kiss, old girl. Know the song, 'My Old Dutch'? Lord! what a pretty little figure you used to be."

She sent him staggering across the cabin.

"That's a dear, little loving wife, that is! a damned sight more like a gaoler, I call it. Gaol! Yes, that's what marriage is. 'Snap,' says the parson, and there you be caged for life." He contemplated her up and down.

"Well, I'm gormed . . . and I can't say fairer than that."

His eyes falling suddenly on the pile of rubbish on the floor he became quite silent, all his buffoonery dead. Mrs. Bodinar watched him like a lynx and saw that he pecked his eye on the top photograph of the pile, that of a group of men. Whistling, he stooped, stared, nosed about, then got himself out of the cabin.

Like a lapwing Mrs. Bodinar swooped to the photograph; it showed a set of workmen, some in blouses and overalls. Bessie's eyes passed slowly from man to man. Then—she knew the joy of a Newton. She held out a big bare arm across the table and kept it fast pressed, for she could almost feel the power sparkle and flash up and down her body in electric waves. Brain messages flew, the something godlike called intuition worked. The same instinct was flashing in Mrs. Bodinar that helps men to fling the gossamers of thought over the yawning chasms of the unknown, for the curiosity that dogs the stars in their courses, the spirit in its secrets, was one with her craving to know. It was the point at which she met her husband's mind.

Then at last she remembered her work and bundling the things helter-skelter into her box, flung down the cover and left the cabin. Never were the birds and fishes of the day's sport more artistically prepared for dinner than on that evening.

When she returned to her cabin there was no hesitation in her movements, for the zest of one piece of knowledge had given her a lust for more. Hauling a glass globe from the bottom of her box, she held it against a square of old, cotton-backed velveteen that, cracked and thinned by years of folding, bent to familiar shapes behind the round ball. Placing it on the table with the bulkhead lamp behind it, she fixed her eyes on the thing.

It was very quiet; only from time to time there came a dull, booming sound from a far distance; it was the glacier edge breaking into the water. The footsteps of the anchor-watch paced up and down. Then a wind moaned and passed. Between the staring woman and her home lay leagues of sea; her vitals were thrilling with an ache to smell the meadow-sweet, to see the shadows of the elms across the Devon grass. Where would the freed spirit take her?

The milky cloudiness that precedes vision gathered over the globe; a tremor passed up the spinal cord; the skin prickled as though threatening goose-flesh. There seeemed a loosening of the ties of the body and she passed into lethargy.

She awoke, stirred, had seen nothing. Blowing out the light, too exhausted for thought, she threw herself on the bunk. In sleep, overhead through the cabin ceiling there opened a shaft of cold air, but the constellations above were not the home stars; she saw that who knew no name of planet or fixed star. The dreamer stirred, moaned and fell asleep again; this time two butterflies circled in sunlight. There was a click, as though a plate had been changed and she knew that behind her lay an eyeless body on which the sea things had fed. The face of the man in life had been perfectly familiar to herself and her husband.

The straggling grey locks on her forehead fell forward as she struggled to sit up. In the light of the night candle she laid her arms around her knees and rocked herself to and fro, the sweat damp on her skin. "Dear Lord," she moaned and shifting her arms gripped her waist, for she was racked with pain. Then, swinging her feet over the side of her berth, she got down and drained the tooth-glass in great gulps. The thing she had seen was as vivid as the glare of a shop window. She turned to her box and presently every single thing it had contained was on the floor. But the photograph that had attracted Bodinar was gone.

"I thought so," she said.

Rounding Tamar Island next day, they caught for a second a glimpse of Cape Pillar at the far western end of the Straits, a solitary steeple point in a whirling curtain of rain and mist. Then with incessant whistling they threaded day by day the inland waterway that curves in one long stretch of three hundred and sixty miles inland up to the Gulf of Peñas and the open waters of the Pacific, sending offshoots of inland seas right up into the foot-hills of the Cordilleras. Piled cloud masses, tossed by the wind into monstrous shapes, hung above the solemn twilight of the steel-grey waters that were girt about with lofty cliffs, clad in evergreens up two thousand feet from the water's edge, with stunted bushes beyond and beyond that again with snow-scarred steeples and pinnacles of bare ancient rock of gneiss or granite. After passing Mount Burney with its glacier of beryl-blue pouring down out of a roof of clouds and mist, almost utter blackness fell on them as the *Coloso* steamed between the rocky walls that guard the bay called Occasion Cove.

"Latitude 51° 42′ 40″ S.," said the skipper as they let go the anchor. He felt he had done the job shipshape and Bristol fashion.

Scarcely anyone aboard slept much that night. From the deck they could discern the long grey outline of an islet. Slowly at last the dawn came; at first the shores of the bay were but shadowy visions of dream. Then they showed themselves to be tree-clad right up to the sands. Inland fell the thin thread of a waterfall where the river leapt a precipice. Near the beach stood the bent branches that mark a deserted native hut. Through the fog everything seemed exaggerated in size along the shore.

As they rowed in, it became clear that the stream was far narrower than in Bodinar's first report and flowed through marsh, not sand,—heavy, weed-grown marsh covered with scurvy grass. Bodinar rowed with the boat's crew, but Scantlebury, the assayer, a long, taciturn, thin-faced lad, was over the gunwale in a second as they grounded.

Over the side of the anchored *Coloso* the crew leant, with a thin column of smoke rising from the galley fire where Cornelius, the only calm man aboard, was frying fish-cakes. Loping across the deck the *Pendragon's* cats played jiujutsu. Billy had stopped to watch them for a second, for they made him think of Boulou and Baby at home in Craneham.

The assayer flung himself flat on his belly across the sand. Clearly, while they waited, they could discern the drip of water from the heavy, sagging branches of the trees, the hissing rise and fall of the waterfall on the breeze. Peter moistened his dry lips and thought of Anne. Queer, somehow, how the women's shadows stood behind the men.

At last the assayer got up and brushed the sand from his trousers. They glared at him as though they were a primeval tribe watching a medicine man.

"Mica," he said curtly, "nothing but mica. No chance of gold. Never found in the neighbourhood of granitic rock."

"Certain?" asked Billy.

"Absolutely."

The tide was at half; they waited till it fell, even setting up tents in impatient expectation of pay-dirt at the tide line. Peter and the assayer forced a way up the river. For it might be that auriferous sand was brought down at certain times of the year from inland cliffs. Great fallen trees, heart-rotten, barred their way; their feet sank deep into layer after layer of moss. More impenetrable than tropic forests, this wood repelled them; reeking, rain-drenched from immemorial ages, it yielded but the enormous globes of yellow fungus which the Alaculof eats. A curious twittering bird followed them, flying close against their faces. Otherwise—death.

Yellow against a livid sky they left the shore behind them next day. Bodinar appeared unruffled, but Billy watched him with a certain doubt; was this the place he had described? There was nothing for it but to turn the boat's head for Punta Arenas, there to search for that remarkable chemist who had found two and a half ounces of gold in a kerosene tin of mica.

"How does he strike you, Peter?" asked Billy as they sat at coffee after dinner.

"Uncommon jaunty," answered Peter.

"So he does me. Like a man that's carried out a scheme successfully. Did he take us to the wrong place purposely, feeling that he'd a whole company against him."

"The discrepancies are easily accounted for. He'd been drinking. Also, he's an imaginative devil, yet, of course a seaman estimates distances better than most men."

They sat smoking in silence. Then Billy went on deck. The ship was at anchor in Collingwood Strait, in sight of the snow-capped peaks of the Cordillera of Sarmiento. The thin, clear moonlight shone on floating ice "calves"; black as Erebus the velvety texture of the tree-clad cliffs.

At the top of the companion steps angry voices caught his ear, one certainly was Bodinar's and the other, apparently, the assayer's.

"I take your sovereign! What the hell do you mean by it?"

"And there's more gone. You've been routling among my papers," said Bodinar.

"Take it back, or——"

This was certainly Scantlebury's voice; cat-like in his soft deck shoes, Billy dropped below. But quicker than himself, he saw Mrs. Bodinar slip like a shadow down the gangway and into the cabin.

"Hold your noise, you fool," she cried.

The fear in her tones arrested Knyvett's attention more than the rough burr of the men's voices. He stood still for a moment, half against his will.

"I've got the picture you took from my box of that murdering villain," she cried. "And what's more the Captain's got the spit of it on his table."

"And there's your sovereign," said Scantlebury. "But I'll not berth with you, you lying scoundrel."

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Billy, advancing from the shadows. Mrs. Bodinar gasped and flung up her hands. Red-eyed and foxy, Bodinar watched them all.

"The Captain's got the spit of it on the table;" it was Mrs. Bodinar who set the match to the tow of Billy's suspicions. "And," said he, with a look at Scantlebury, "I think we'll clear it up privately, since it seems rather a domestic matter."

The assayer vanished and Mrs. Bodinar flattened her bulbous body against the bulkhead.

"Now," said Knyvett, "I don't want to put anybody to an inconvenience, but . . . since Mrs. Bodinar has been good enough to take an interest in the contents of my desk——"

"You'll not get anything out of me, sir," she said quietly.

"No? Then your husband and I'll settle it. The photograph on my desk is that of a man whose acquaintance I've long wished to make. So do several other people, it seems. And you evidently know him well. What we want is an introduction."

He fixed his glance on Mrs. Bodinar who stood with her mouth primmed up, like a cat at a polite tea-party, but he watched Simon out of the tail of his eye.

"Was this man by any chance Reuben Pycroft whom you met at Coronel?"

A slight quiver of Mr. Bodinar's eyelids warned him.

"Well, not Reuben Pycroft always. No doubt he has plenty of aliases. Now," he asked, suddenly turning, "what did he give you that gold-dust for?

"Payment! that's what the twelve pounds' worth of gold meant. You'd evidently been useful to him. It looks fishy—combined with what the Consul writes me.

"Mrs. Bodinar knows, I see. But I think we'll keep her out of it."

"I'll not go, so there!" panted Bessie. "Simon, thee a't a fule. Why don't 'ee speak out and say you've naught to do with it?"

Suddenly Bodinar went down with a run, like an eight-day clock when the weights collapse.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" he chortled in his beard. "You can't clap me in chokey, Captain *Billy* Knyvett. And what a mare's nest you've run your head into, too. Lord! it's as good as a play. Don't 'ee see yourself a-leading me along a victim to the slaughter, with garlands on my forehead and bells on my toes? Did you think you'd see me swing for this? Didn't I know there'd be rigs o' Dover when one o' the gentry found he'd been had?" He snapped his fingers every moment nearer to Knyvett's face.

"Simon! Simon! you fule-head," shouted Bessie in agony. "Why Reuben Pycroft's nobody but Harry Marks."

"Harry Marks?" said Billy struggling with a memory.

"Ay," said Bodinar, "what was wanted for the murder o' Tom Rendle, the manager of the Plymouth printing works whose books he'd been playing Old Harry with. Cashier he was. And Rendle found with a bullet in his head in the counting house after he'd been having a go at the books the night before. But he got away?"

"And you found him in Coronel?"

Bodinar nodded. "He was doing well there, too. Funky sort of a chap. Didn't want to move on."

"And Mrs. Bodinar knew him?"

"He's her cousin."

"Well," said Billy, "you've done me. But what did you get by it, after all? For you've had your bad times, that I'll swear."

"This," answered Bodinar, "that I've got the laughing side of one of the damned gentry. Drawed 'em along, I did, like rats after a bit o' bacon, they that lay down the law and treat us poor devils same as they might the mud beneath their feet, the dirty snobs. They that take the education for theirselves and look down on us, cos us got none. But what sort o' stuff do they cram our chillern with? Something that's good enough for the damned workingmen. Shut up," he shouted to his wife, "I'll speak out for once. And you, haven't you toted 'em along in your way, too?

> "Off Diego Ramirez, where the Ildefonsos roar,
> There's gold, there's gold, there's gold galore."

He swung himself out of the room, his own man for once.

Later on Mrs. Bodinar came to the saloon.

"Well," asked Billy with a smile, "is he covered up yet? For I was just looking into a brain with the lid off, Bessie. There now, don't you worry, who am I that I should grudge a fellow creature a bit of heaven at my expense."

Mrs. Bodinar went out to make Simon a particularly fine squab pie, out of Billy's onions, and cold-storage mutton, for she, too, approved of a decent spoiling of the Egyptians.

"Peter," said Billy, as they went on deck together, "have you ever done anything when you were up in the bough and then regretted it when you came to earth?"

Peter kept silence, trying to get the meaning of this cryptic speech.

"Sara will be by now about where the sea-fire begins to follow in the wake of the ship," Billy went on, leaning over the taffrail. "It must seem to her like a bad dream this . . . this Antarctic twilight. So it does to me."

By his voice Peter knew that he was very far from the arboreal stage just then. From the port-hole below came the sound of a man snoring in the knots and untyings of his first sleep.

"Bodinar?" twinkled Billy. "Well, there's one happy man aboard. Shall we ever lay salt on the tail of Reuben Pycroft, alias Harry Marks?"

But they never did; nor did Mrs. Bodinar ever know the "outs" of her dream. But she always maintains that Pycroft got his quietus that night.

For over on the moors by Great Kneeset, the pair live on the glorious memory of the fairy gold in the region of the Ildefonsos. Moreover, Bodinar still has the *Pendragon's* chronometer, though Billy can't imagine what became of it. Mrs. Bodinar, however, regards it as an heirloom.

CHAPTER XVI

MÉTIER DE FEMME, THE OLD AND THE NEW; IN THIS VIN HEREFORD SHUFFLES OFF THE DOMESTIC COIL, MRS. KNYVETT RETRIEVES A SITUATION AND SIGNOR GUARINI DOES A LITTLE DIGGING

THEY sat at Craneham holding a court of inquiry into the crime of Sara Bellew, *née* Hereford. It was the tender time of the blossoming of the pear tree, and the scented snow of spring blew in gusts across the lawn before the southwest wind. The apple-green of the evening sky delighted old Vin's eyes, even as his daughter's deeds satisfied his soul, for the clear shining of the west was on his reverend white head, the clear lucidity of intellectual delight in his heart, since Sara had run away from her husband, thereby proving what he had always upheld, her fitness for wifehood. Mrs. Woodruffe listened, as one shares in another's misfortunes—with joy at the zest of them and yet as one who watches a triumphant display of casuistry, marvellous proof of the mental mastery of the race. Anne simmered in ironic delight; only Uncle Pip was, being a plain man and slow, most unfeignedly miserable.

All four heads, the torso of Neptune, the bebugled, dew-lapped frontage of the matron, the coy, sleek comeliness of the maid, the rugged massivity of the farmer, were bent forward into a circle in the attitude of the quoit-thrower while as into a witches' brew old Vin threw his daughter's life. There is always a suggestion of the obscene at such a sight, as when the Almighty claws the spider, man, for more adequate frying over the Pit.

"Yes," purred Vin, "Sara was a pupil of Guarini, yes, *the* Guarini, the Italian pianist, of humble extraction, but a master. He thought highly of her playing, wanted her to wither, a barren stalk . . ."

"Eh," said Mrs. Woodruffe, laying back her ears at the biblical flavour, "but I thought she never had any children."

"A barren stalk," flowed he mellifluously, like a moorland stream that refuses to be dammed. "I speak, of course, of her potential barrenness. In point of fact, he wanted her unmarried. But I was firm. He actually asked me to hand her over to him to train. 'Train,' said I, 'does very well as a word to apply to dirty little urchins. It is not for a demoiselle.' 'Rachel?' said he, 'Sarah Siddons?' He used to spit out his words like an infuriated grimalkin.

"'One,' said I, 'the daughter of a Jew peddler, and the other of a strolling player.' But he was equal to it. 'Gentility,' said he, 'feeds like a Minotaur on the brains of fair virgins.' Then Archer came, swam into our horizon like a sun. The child was dazzled. She was a woman, only fitted for wifehood. My intuitions are always trustworthy. She was—and is—a true woman." He closed his eyes and Uncle Pip groaned, like one convicted of sin at a conventicle.

"Because she's bolted?" snapped Anne.

"Because she felt the need of support, of that tender solicitude which is her life, every lovely woman's life. One man fails her, she seeks another. It is as beautiful an instance in its way of Nature's great plan, this escapade of our dear Sara, as the leaves with their oxygen, the animals with their carbonic acid gas. Need answers need in both cases. One on the psychic, the other on the physical plane. One sees in it all—woman clinging to man; man so ready for support—the work of the Great Artificer. I know of no more lovely instance than this of divine brainwork."

"What a beautiful thought!" cried Mrs. Woodruffe, with the far-seeing gaze that accompanies cosmic vision. "It shows how differently the higher mind regards these things. The facts in themselves so crude, so painfully crude. A woman elopes; so it seems to the vulgar. And to your mind—this."

She made play with hands delicately gloved, thus proving herself of the Thrice-Born in Eastern imagery.

"Good Lord!" cried Uncle Pip, under the *peine forte et dure*, "and the child's future unknown, her name dragged in the mud. And no chance of whitewashing. I'm a hog, but I'm damned if I ain't glad to be."

Mrs. Woodruffe raised pained eyebrows; she saw in her inward eye his hayricks, pigsties, *et cetera*; she was in fact quite visibly declining the noun *agricola*.

"Good old boy," beamed Anne, and pinched his arm.

Mrs. Woodruffe heard the whisper; it aroused her malice. "And," she said, "I came away all in a twitter at the idea of the thing happening to a family I know; the courts, the cross-examining—dreadful! I thought of my daughter, so intimate as she has been with Mrs. Bellew. I really don't mind confessing now that I thought I should have to give Molly just a word about being careful. A young wife, you see! Of course I should never have minded for myself."

"I hope," said Anne demurely, "that father has shown how satisfactory to everyone this is. To prove a law of Nature! What could be lovelier? I'll make a note of it to tell Sara."

"If every parent had acted," continued Vin, "as firmly as I, we should never have seen the appalling developments of these later days. Up till now the one creature that has sunk all things before the call of race has been woman. She has held nothing back—not even personality, in order to hand on the torch of life. "Woman," he boomed, "has been the saviour of the race. Claiming nothing, she has given all. Up till to-day, this fatal day. But the Eastern woman is still faithful; the most beautiful custom of which I have ever heard is that of the youngest and loveliest Japanese maidens who offer themselves for a few years on the altar of those passions that replenish the race."

"Or that don't—in the form you mean," interposed Anne.

"Thank Heaven," said he, "I have one daughter who is still a woman."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Anne, unable any longer to keep her secret, "there have been some surprises. Sara is coming back from her Antarctic exploration. I heard this morning."

"Rather strange if she didn't," snapped he, "the South Pole is scarcely the place in which one would choose to reside."

"But she's coming back alone."

Uncle Pip rose, slowly lengthening out like an uncoiling boa-constrictor.

"Then Knyvett's dead?"

"Not in the least. He's joined the staff of engineers on the Andean railway."

"You mean she did not get out in time to catch him! Now that's just a woman's management, of course. Tut, tut, tut. That's Mrs. Knyvett, without a doubt," said Vin.

"On the contrary, they met, she stayed a few days, but they have parted."

"And she comes back alone! Goodness gracious!" shrieked Mrs. Woodruffe. "Oh, my dear child, my heartfelt sympathy is with you. But how abominably that man has behaved. His mother is the person I pity most. What a reflection on her upbringing. I never can be too thankful that left alone as I was, with but one fatherless child, it turned out to be a girl."

"You don't understand," explained Anne, patiently lecturing, "Sara went out to nurse Mr. Knyvett and finding him recovered she is returning to take up her profession, where father made her lay it down. She has lost twelve years of her life, of course, but that, I suppose, must happen while our parents experiment with us."

"And you expect people to take it like that! Well, all I can say——"

"Before you say all you can, I should like to remind you, Mrs. Woodruffe, that an affair like this is one in which each person reflects his own nature. Don't give yourself away, that's all."

"Anne," said Uncle Pip, "you're a brick. This is what I've been waiting for. If I've said it to Hatty once, I've said it a hundred times—our Sara's as clear as the day."

"I don't think I was so far wrong," said Anne, catching Mrs. Woodruffe's eye.

That lady, fearing a woman adversary, fell on the man.

"And let me tell you," she said, turning to Mr. Hawkins, "that from your very position you are, of course, ignorant of the world. But you should really have the sense to leave this kind of thing to the people who understand it."

"Well, I'm——"

"No, no, don't let us have any of these rough quarter-deck expressions. It used to be allowed before ladies, but it's quite gone out now, Mr. Hawkins."

But Mr. Hereford was not to be caught out; his mind was as pliable to new forms as an astral body.

"Ah," he said, "I am far from being a *laudator temporis acti*, but now this proves what I have always said, that with genius goes moral irregularity. Sara is a genius; she cannot, therefore, bow to the Ten Commandments. Art flourished in times like Cellini's, when morality was a topic no man took lightly on his lips—which, in fact, the majority never took on their lips at all. To that age belongs Sara, that sacred age."

In the full flood of his eloquence, they thought he scarcely noted that Sara had been generous to him; having no intention of returning to bondage, she had made over to him before she left England a deed of gift bestowing Craneham on him for his lifetime. He was happier than he had been for a long time in the prospect of release from those gaolers, his daughters.

"Anne," said he that night, "you will be wanting to get back to your work; we will write out an advertisement for a cultivated housekeeper with a musical voice.

We have capital servants who are very attentive to me. It is only Elizabeth who presumes. These old retainers are more trouble than they are worth."

So Elizabeth found herself adrift—and happy. For could she not go straight to Madame Sara ?

"*Mon Dieu*," cried she, when Anne parrotted, "ought we to leave him ? *Mon Dieu*, and if the Blessed One opens the cell door by a crack, is not that a sign that He means a thin one to get through ? And neither thou nor I, *petite Anne*, is a gross cabbage. Besides, nothing suits the messieurs better than a change of women."

"When will he want us back, think you ?" asked Anne.

"When he hath his winter pains," answered Elizabeth. "Meanwhile there is the summer before us."

So they took, both of them, that sunny road to liberty which so often begins with the purchase of a railway-ticket. They met Sara when she landed, Elizabeth curvetting, in spirit at any rate, like a ram in mountain pastures. The green mist of trees against the London smoke was a promise of new life to Sara. Also with these two there was no need of explanations ; they made holiday, therefore, that queer trio, for twenty-four hours, till Anne went to her work and Sara to Mrs. Knyvett ; it was, somehow, a shuddery thing to do.

Then, in the softly lighted drawing-room, with the rose of the sunset shining through the tree branches outside, she waited, the room wavering before her eyes, as though it were a cabin. For, in the capacity of a new Sara, she was afraid of Billy's mother. She had played too deep a part in the older woman's life to be sure of her reception.

But when Mrs. Knyvett held her in an all-comprehensive embrace as though the world were reeling beneath their feet she felt as though that fair ship, the *Sara*, had flung out grappling irons on solid earth. They sat down in silence till the great homely tabby leapt on the visitor's lap and with its soft purr and discreetly inquisitive nose awoke her from dream to a perception of the lonely road before her. Tabby was so safely anchored. Mrs. Knyvett understood.

"My dear," she cried, "I wouldn't have had it happen to you for forty thousand pounds."

"It was quite the best thing possible," said Sara, "there are so many who never find themselves. Billy and I have done that, anyway. And—you've got your wish. Billy's out of the wood; he's gone back to his work."

"But in what a fashion! That a son of mine should act like this! With every obligation——"

It was the one note she should not have struck; too late she saw it.

"Love," said Sara, "has nothing to do with obligation. And the fool-talk about honour has trapped us all too long. Too many crimes have been committed in *that* name."

"At any rate," said Mrs. Knyvett, "I've written a letter to him."

"And sent it?" asked Sara, rising, very white and still.

"No, it's not sent. You can read it, if you like."

Sara took the paper, glanced through it, and laid it down. Then, head held back, till the breadth of its strong oval became apparent, she said quietly:

"You'll not send it. For if you do he'll come back as a man might—to marry his mistress."

They were both silent, yet they understood; Mrs. Knyvett's courage rose.

"But he was pledged tacitly—all these years," she said, knowing all the time that the battle was lost. "And," she asked, "don't you realise what a difference all this has made?"

Sara laughed; there was something so fresh and young in the sound that Mrs. Knyvett positively jumped. "Oh, perfectly," she said, "they'll wave all the silly fripperies that are supposed to make up a woman's life at me. But Billy lives outside all that. Haven't you ever realised what damnable tyranny it is that free things can't live out their freedom? Respectability! who'd care for it if it wasn't a part of the stock in trade by which one gets one's living. And at best it merely means keeping sin furtive. For folks like Uncle Pip I'm sorry. That's all."

"I suffer, too, Sara."

"Not so much as you imagine. And you wouldn't at all if you just went down into your own mind and acknowledged what you saw there. May I tear this up?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Knyvett, for, torn between the world of show and the world of fact, she had come over to the world of fact, confessing that all the solid fruits of victory were hers. Then she lifted up her heart and planned a campaign in which dinners, receptions, and theatre parties formed the siege-work.

"By all the fools in Christendom," cried she, "we'll knock their nasty notions all to bits. Mrs. Archer Bellew shall drop her flag to no impish satyr."

"But Mr. Archer Bellew, where is he?" asked Sara. "I've searched the papers since I got back and found not a word."

"Riding a camel in the Sahara, they say. Anyway, he's lost in African wilds and there'll be no dramatic curtain *à l'Américaine*. You can enjoy your flutter safely."

"Umm," meditated Sara, "I suppose I can take a month to bury my dead. Then I'm off—to Guarini."

"Oh, my dear, won't it be gorgeous? Cards to meet my daughter-in-law that should be, returned from an unofficial honeymoon in the South Pole."

"But——"

"My love, there's no better way in the world than a scandal for separating the sheep from the goats, your true friends from your false ones. The day of judgment's a fool to it. And this has been positively the dullest season on record."

So they settled to the fray; there were some lively engagements, more especially cuts direct from small people, small usually in both senses of the word. It was discovered that the morality of persons "on the make" was particularly sensitive, though a few there were that oscillated. Among these was that fair provincial, Mrs. Stephen Anerley, whose glacial coldness in the afternoon was atoned for by a tropic warmth at night, a warmth in which it was difficult to discover whether self-interest or simple friendliness was the motive spring.

At last Margaret Rossiter returned to town and Mrs. Knyvett took Sara to call. The small woman in the white furs seemed strangely familiar to Mrs. Bellew; they talked at once as those who can plumb the deep waters together. Mrs. Knyvett, seeing this, went on to another function.

" You know," said Sara, " that I've left—Archer, that I'm not going back to him."

" So I've heard."

" It was for his sake—at first," said Sara.

" But not now ? " asked Margaret, lifting her eyebrows. She had acquired a quite abysmal calm that was strange in a being so mercurial.

" No ; it's for my own now."

" I'm glad," commented Margaret.

" Why ? "

" Because I think you may have acted under a misapprehension. Didn't you ? " she asked, suddenly bending forward and laying a hand on Sara's knee.

" You thought I could go back," said Margaret, " perhaps you think so still ? "

" I'm not so sure now," hesitated Sara.

" No ? " asked Margaret. " Well, you're right. It isn't that all this "—she pointed to the pictures—" is worth more to me than he is. It is that——"

She broke off and nodded towards the table where a new novel lay open.

" You've read that ? " she asked.

Sara shook her head.

" Well, it's Archer's new book. And it's a failure. He's tried to put down the commonplace, every-day things that make up our days.' It takes a great man to do that—to show the commonplace and the beauty under it, for when he can't show the beauty, he just shows his own vulgarity."

Suddenly something in Sara broke, some pride, some pity ; it has no name.

"Margaret," she cried, "think of what he was to you, the man you are dissecting."

The other flushed, trembled; she heard the tinkling fall of shattered glass. All the woman in her swayed, rose to her lips. Sara held out her arms.

"My dear, you do—still."

"Yes, I do. But that never prevents one from seeing, you know. Not really, though one may pretend. Take the plain truth; he wasn't made to love women like you and me. He'd never find the best of life with us. A little toy with tinkling jewels, a gazelle-eyed Zoraïda, she would give the best he could get from a woman. But you and I? No. It takes a bigger man than the poor knave of hearts to love you or me."

"But to help?" asked Sara. "Ought we not?"

Then Margaret flashed into laughter. "My dear," she said, "the Lord may have made us women prigs, but He generally also makes us discover our humour on the threshold of the nuptial chamber."

"No, no, no," cried Sara, "only when we approach our meridian and have known many men."

"Perhaps you're right," said Margaret, rubbing the tip of her nose. Then she added: "That's the devil of it."

And they both laughed, being well able to, since neither was a straw blown by the gale nor an Æolian harp touched by the winds of passion.

Two days later Giovanni Guarini sat in his pleasant seaward-looking room in the Breton fishing town he visited every year. Plentifully bedewed with snuff, his deep-wrinkled face shone with good humour. Overhead hung the wonderful portrait that went everywhere with him, from Russia to the States; it was a Rembrandtesque study of an old peasant woman, his mother in fact.

"She," as he would say, pointing to it, "that made me what I am."

The toil-worn hands planted firmly on the knees, the withered face expressed a force, a gripping power that was repeated in her son; the shapeless bedgown drawn across the hanging breasts hid a strength and fibre that had something in it of the tenuous, yet wiry resistance of the taut string. And in the eyes was the tenderness, the unflinching power to face dark things that only mother-eyes can show. She had known the grinding poverty of a lifetime of toil, had looked on dead sons, had smiled upon the living. They called the portrait Guarini's mascot. And every year he found time to slip away from grand cities to live like a village crony, renewing his youth in memory.

Just now the musician in him was merged in the archæologist. The parlour reeked of pipes, the air hurtled with furious terms, only at the far end of the stivy room the polished surface of the grand piano shone like a mirror. It had, indeed, been dusted by Giovanni's own big silk handkerchief; for on it no man but his secretary dared to lay sacrilegious hand.

"Phut! my dear Abbé," cried the great Guarini, "but thou art a jester of the first rank!" He crossed his hands in cosy appreciation of the other's humour.

"I am not joking, Signor," said the Abbé Porchère. "I asserted it as a fact, on my faith as a genealogist and historian. The line of descent of the Porchères from Baldwin Bras-de-Fer, who fought by the side of William the Norman, and was rewarded by him with a grant of broad lands, is crystal clear. I," said he haughtily, "am the last of the line of Bras-de-Fer."

"Thou," shrieked Guarini, snapping his fingers furiously, "thou to give ear to a legend so palpably false. Why, then, the change of name? Why Bras-de-Fer to Porchère? On what dost thou found this statement?"

"On genealogy, on documents. I am a man who believes in the written word, Signor. And as for the change of name, bah, it is a mere bagatelle. Look at the estate of my family, the estate of Ferrebras."

"Ferrebras!" cried the musician, "Ferrebras, in the valley of St. Ouen! A miserable little starveling of a place with nothing in it but sheep. Does a great baron retire to St. Ouen?"

He snapped his fingers close to Porchère's nose.

"The heart of the richest land in Normandy," said the Abbé Porchère unmoved. "Compare the arms of Bras-de-Fer and of the Porchères. It is almost the same—in both a cubit-arm erect holding in the hand a sword all proper."

There hurtled through the air shouts of *gules, chevronels, martlets, passant, guardant,* till the household outside told its beads furiously in horror at the devils whom the master was invoking.

"From canting heraldry thou canst deduce anything," cried Guarini. "Besides, there is a hiatus in the line of descent, and as for Porchère, 'tis naught but a female swineherd. The connection is none too creditable to Bras-de-Fer."

"He trumpeteth still," cried Guarini's man to the assembled Bretons. "But," he whispered after a time, "there is a lull."

And so there was for a time, till the two struck on an even worse subject—the question of the date of a prehistoric barrow on the hill farm. Signor Guarini would have it to be pre-Christian, cyst or urn-burial, therefore, while M. Porchère was of the opposite opinion.

"Pre-Christian!" shouted Guarini.

"Extended burial!" cried M. Porchère.

That night there was a bright moon. In the silvery radiance of it two dark figures crept up the hill, one with a pickaxe, the other with a spade, for the mystery of Bras-de-Fer was insoluble; but a barrow can be opened.

The same idea had struck them both, but the sight of each other was startling. They fell back and trembled.

"You!" cried M. Porchère.

"You!" cried Guarini. Then he roused himself. "It is well," said he, "we will work together."

They felt like ghouls when they first fell on that barrow, for the noise of the pickaxe was unseemly.

"Hist!" exclaimed M. l'Abbé at last. There was a suffocating moment as a gigantic shadow approached—the shade, no doubt, of neolithic man. The Abbé was bald, as well as tonsured, but his fringe of hair rose.

"Ho! Ho!" shouted lungs of brass. "It's Monsieur l'Abbé digging up the grave of my grandfather's old mare. She'd been too fine a brood mare for aught but honourable burial, so he opened the old barrow."

At these words Signor Guarini picked up his wits. "The old barrow," he asked, "and what did thy grandfather find therein when he laid in it the animal?"

"Why, an old urn with a lot of ashes."

"Then," cried the savants together, "it *was* pre-Christian."

"You were right," cried the Abbé, "your instinct, like your music, is masterly. And," he confessed generously, "there is a hiatus in the line of Bras-de-Fer, and I have found a cubit-arm erect in no less than five fields."

"Embrace me, *mon ami*," said Monsieur Guarini, much moved. "That madness of thine hath passed."

"But who," asked the farmer, "is to tidy up the mess you've made?"

"I'll send up a man to-morrow," said Guarini, taking snuff and joyously seizing the Abbé by the arm. They returned to the town in love and good fellowship. Hence it befell that the Italian received the news in all good humour when they told him that an English madame was waiting for him and would take no refusal. He bent his shaggy brows over the card.

"As sure," said he, "as the Lord made little apples, this is Sara Hereford, *la petite* Sara, come back from the tomb of wedlock. Send in champagne and cakelets and go, all of ye, to bed."

"So, so," he cried, clasping his visitor's hands and leading her over to the light, "it is. And the husband? He is dead?"

Sara laughed gaily at his joy in Bellew's demise.

"Not quite that," she said, and told her story.

"Ha!" cried he, "you want to come back?" Then, suddenly darting forth a claw, he shook a forefinger at her. "And what has done it, this?"

She tried to tell him.

"So," said he, "the lover remains. Ho! Hum! the lover remains."

He was twisting his mouth into wry shapes like an india-rubber baby in the fingers of an urchin.

"Now, play," he commanded, "play what pleases you."

When she had finished he leant forward and tapped her on the knee three times.

"So," he said, "you come here, you who have lost the good time of your life, and you say, teach me to make music. You haf been disappointed in lof. *Hein?* Isn't it so? Now would you have come to me if this second man had—what you call—opened his arms?" He turned himself into a spread-eagle.

"No."

"No, say you. Then if he comes back, you give up this, your *pis aller* and leave poor Guarini in the lurch. No, Madame Sara, not on these terms."

"Wait," she said, "listen. Year by year, we are taught, we women, to live by love—that it is our highest word. I believed it till I was shaken out of the belief. He, my lover, had his work, the thing he was made to do. He put it first, before me. Oh, I know; he said it was that *I* had not made up my mind. But I had and he knew it. He was not willing to be distracted from the thing there was before him to do, by me. I was a bird in hand. He would not take me. There would have been fuss, lawyers, letter-writing. He would not have been left with a mind free to his task. I saw for the first time my place in the scheme of things. But—it was the right place. I am only a light woman till I can do my work. I ask you to help me to it. If you won't, I go to another."

He was silent, for he was not of those who dare to quench the smoking flax.

"But he will come back," he said at last.

"And if so," she said, "it will be but a secret place of joy for us, a little more of life for me to play into my music. Do you not know how love lives? By those who love remaining lovers. It is not the *ménage à deux* I live for. I should still do my work."

"But, *per Bacco*, there may be bambini."

"Will they be the worse for a mother who works?"

"And that same is what nobody knows," answered he grimly. "It's for you and your like to prove it."

"Then help me. Give me the chance. Ah, Master, forget it is a woman."

"I'm not likely to do that," he said, lifting the light so that it fell on the old woman's face. "She worked," he said softly; "I've seen her carrying home the firewood, a fagot twice her size, lips tight-pressed, thin strong arms like bands of iron. Ah, *Madre mia!*" he cried. "I was born with a black eye from his kick, my father."

"Help me, Master," said Sara, as they stood gazing up at the old peasant mother.

"And you'll be looking to do something to show what women can do, thinking of all the others whom custom binds, enslaves, makes toys of? Hey, Madonna?"

"Yes, yes, yes," she answered, with shining eyes.

Suddenly he altered his tone. "But," he said, "the thing you want to serve is above all these things. Art is no luxury, least of all is music; it is the thing by which man learns to conquer life. High, hard service, it demands. I play the buffoon—to forget for an hour. Only for an hour, though. Look you; civilisation gives power, wealth, ease, leisure to the few. And what does all this make them? Beasts, hogs, swine. The things they have created conquer them. The one man who puts them all beneath his feet is the artist—and only too often he succumbs. Poets, artists, writers, down they go before the riot of life. Then they are no longer artists. For four-square above ease and luxury and passion the artist must stand.

"Can you do this? True, you would only be an interpreter, but you would want it all, all the power, none the less. And you, a woman, have, above all other causes of weakness, to breast the waves of centuries of inbred indolence. Can you? Can you?"

He was speaking in Italian; she answered in the same tongue.

"I can. I will."

"Then—three years of study, alone. In Germany and in mine own land. I will o'erwatch, will send you where you can find what you want. But no folly, no weakness of the woman, no lover! And no starvation;

the artist must be ascetic in the midst of luxury; must breathe Sicilian air and still be of the mountain tops. 'And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me'; that is true of the artist, but—he must first be lifted up. Can you follow this high path?"

She thought an instant; walked to the window and flung up the sash. The sound of the sea filled the room.

"And if I fail?" she asked, turning round, "if you cannot make me what you think you may?"

"Madonna," he answered gently, "if I believed that any effort is ever lost, I should not be able to live. I do not know how they *do* live who believe we cease to be of the Great Breath when the little breath we borrowed passes no more through our nostrils. I have seen so many fail—here."

"But I have no money now."

"It shall be found. You will pay it back some time. And if not, not."

Sara remembered the night at Craneham when Anne had borrowed a loan of Billy; she was ending where Anne had begun.

She put out her hand to the old man: "It is yes?" asked he.

And it was yes.

CHAPTER XVII

LA SALLE DES PAS PERDUS; IN THIS ANNE SEES A VISION, GUARINI PAYS A DEBT AND BELLEW VIEWS A LOST LAND

It was four years later. As the hansom scraped the kerbstone Bellew's glance fell full on a woman who was standing on the bottom step of the hall; he saw that it was Margaret Rossiter. With a bound and a bow he was by her side; she held out her hand cordially. Grey fog, shot with sunshine, hid the street vistas; in the clop-clop of the horses' feet, the scent of violets and the iridescence of the air there was a sense of ease and pleasure. It carried the man and woman away with it on a wave of joy. Bellew handed his fare to the cabby and took tickets for himself and Margaret.

It was Sara's first performance in London after her three years' training and would be the last for a time, since in the autumn she was billed for the States. For the old fox, Guarini, had not sported in the sea of success for forty years without knowing the lie of quicksands, shoals and vigias. For a year he had piloted Sara from capital to capital; there now remained but London, the centre of a country that still every first day of the week makes ghastly noises on harmoniums because it is the Sabbath. England, as he knew, still bows to nothing but a reputation. Nor can even a great master draw the same crowd twice, since he is regarded much as a freak show. In London, then, Guarini had starred the boards with his own name, thus securing an audience for Madame Sara.

From window to window across the heads of the audience stretched shafts of silver fog, the dancing place for motes. Margaret sank down in her seat with a sigh of pleasure.

"Looks well," said Bellew, nodding at the serried rows.

"Guarini, that means," answered she.

"It is Sara's show, though," said he, after a glance at his programme.

"Guarini's cunning, I mean," she laughed. "They come to see him, but it is Sara they will really hear. And billed together! Just think of what that means to her."

Out of the corners of her eyes she noted him; lean, lithe, tanned, with the quality of control in his glance. Sara had been right; to a man of his calibre outward conformity coupled with inward revolt had been the source of nothing but degradation. Also his life in the East was evidently more to his taste; his work had been better, more finished, with a command of irony he had not shown before. Most men, in fact, write better of English life away from England, in lands where one may draw breath without taking lessons on the scientific and moral aspect of the breathing apparatus.

Yet they were not free, he and Sara, since the law could offer nothing but judicial separation, a thing which a woman of power can perfectly well obtain, for all practical purposes, for herself.

"Look, Peter," said Anne, touching her husband's arm as she caught sight of Margaret. Mr. and Mrs. Westlake had only just managed to catch a noon train from the midlands, for Anne's practice was a large one. Now, with nerves thrilling like the strings of a violin, she waited for Sara's appearance. The sisters had not met for four years.

"Oh," she cried, "how wild it makes me to think that they should force a woman like Sara to go through the divorce court as the guilty one to carve out an honest life for them all. Why in the world didn't Bellew create a scandal? Then there'd have been desertion and unfaithfulness on his side."

"*That,*" said Peter, nodding towards Margaret and Archer, "will never be."

"And what does that matter? Is Sara herself never to be free?"

"She will be soon," said he; "Billy lands in a few days."

"And Sara—Sara—to be the one to have to go through the mud for all their sakes. I tell you, I see red."

"Never mind. She's above it all now," said Peter.

"Nobody is above, in the sense you mean," snapped Anne.

But from the shadows at the back of the platform, a figure had emerged into the light. It was Guarini, standing with one hand on the Bechstein. As the house rose at him, Anne's eyes filled with sudden tears. She had caught, as one may when the cloud-cap of routine lifts for a second, a glimpse of the awful contrast between the top and bottom of the ladder that we call the human. Her last night had been spent in the chamber of birth; between the squalid, pain-haunted gateway of life and the power in that punchinello figure, what a distance to be traversed!

Soon Sara was playing the Kreutzer Sonata; since Mrs. Woodruffe's party much water had flowed under the bridge. Old Vin had not lived to see his daughter's genius proved by aught but a moral lapse, and Elizabeth had soon followed him.

Anne leant forward and looked at the rows of women; there were delicate faces flushed and alive; older, stronger faces set and almost hard. And here Sara played the Kreutzer, leading them all into the cloudy overworld; there gleamed Margaret Rossiter's white hair; last week the nation had bought a picture of hers. The power of women like these two only cast the darker shadow on those others—women sold by millions to base marriage because no other trade is open to them, women kept behind locked doors in this very city to feed the vilest lusts, women sold as slaves to the hells of far-off continents,—a trade that no civilised nation ever lifts effective hands to stop. Women everywhere exploited.

These and those.

Anne threw herself in prayer right up the stairway to the feet of God for those women bound by the tyranny of bygone centuries to the vile service of sex. And to her thought came answer: "Lo, I make all things new." For love, the furtive thing that drags its slime through gutter and church alike, shall one day be but the inspiration to new life.

She quivered and trembled, till Peter slipped a hand in hers and her mind flew to her own hard-working days, to her boy at home. It was good to fight, to feel the courage to live in every vein.

Margaret Rossiter was better able to appreciate what Guarini had done, to realise the inexplicable blending of all the human tones in Sara's playing, as unlike as possible from Guarini's aerial, half-unearthly music. He was for the gnomes and sprites of the overworld; she was blood-fast, racial. In her playing the old went back to memories; the young, forward into the future. For Sara's playing dealt with the song the race sings to the soul; old, half-forgotten things, the glory that touches us in the taste of apples, in the dripping of the wine-press, in the smell of earth.

"He has helped her to find herself," said Bellew, as Guarini led her forward at the end.

To the old musician, as Sara knew, the work he had done was but paying back to her, the woman, the debt he owed to another woman, the bent, grey-haired mother, with the scarred and knotted hands who, bruised and beaten, had yet given him life.

"Madonna," said he, "it went well."

That was better than all the plaudits of the crowd.

"And now," he continued, "for Monsieur l'Abbé Porchère, the old rascal. Such things he's been saying!"

For Guarini wanted a holiday badly.

In the artists' room Bellew sought Sara. He found her in the midst of a crowd that instinctively made way for him. They had not met since the night at Craneham that was still so vivid in their memories. In the green flash of his eyes, Sara read his passion; it was hatred that swayed him momentarily, the hatred of finding himself thrust aside. For this woman, all sufficient in mail of power, was his wife, yet not his wife.

He murmured words of congratulation to which neither listened. Then she led the way to the embrasure of a window where they could talk unheard.

"You understand why I—left?" she asked.

"Quite," said he curtly.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

And when he was silent, she went on:

"I wanted to put wrong, right. I tried. I failed. Then I knew that I must make my own place."

His eyes darkened curiously, for his instincts were those of an honest man. He had never doubted Sara's intentions in any one way. To him she was never a light woman.

He told her so.

"But I must be free for your sake, for all our sakes," she cried; "there is but one way. We will none of us live with maimed lives that we can make whole."

Forcing back the words that would have sounded like a taunt, he said:

"But—he?"

"Yes," she said, "he is ready. And you will release us."

Anger flashed again in his eyes. "You see," he said cruelly, "after all, whatever you may dare, you must fall back on me in the end. *I* have the casting vote."

He felt as though he had whipped her, as she stood, shivering like a thoroughbred, yet quiet. But it was true, so damnably true.

"Forgive me," he cried. "Of course you ought to be free. Believe me, my dear, if there were any possible way left me that I could take to free you without your going through the courts, I would. But you must. Oh, Sara, I'm sorry."

They shook hands, wide-eyed, like two children. Then it struck him that there was another way out. He hurried away to Margaret and found her in her flat, drinking tea and gazing at the cosy little fire she had lit for companionship. They were very silent for a long while, till Margaret roused herself to tell him that the logs on the fire-dogs were just wreckage. She had, by luck, heard of a ship-load for sale.

"Margaret," asked he at last, "have you forgiven me?"

"Of course. Long ago," she answered, "I was taken up by a big wave and tossed ashore. But I made shift to crawl to safety. That's where those came from——" she nodded at her paintings. "In every woman's life that's worth while there's a secret niche where stands an angel, called Pain."

He moved uneasily.

"It's worse for the man," said he, "for he cannot repair."

She laughed, understanding him thoroughly.

"No, thank God," she said, "for if a woman's got to be skinned, she needn't be boiled as well. Take the plain truth. You and I were no more suitable than oil and water. You showed more wisdom then than in all your life before and after."

"Then you wouldn't marry me now if I asked you?" he blurted out.

"Gracious, no," said she.

Her answer was so genuinely frank that he laughed.

"And, really," she said, "I believe I get the best of it as it is. I work with men, live with them *en bon camarade*. And what good fellows they are, that way. But most women never know them so. That's why they despise them. For, believe me, my dear, the face men turn to the women they love is mostly a satyr's. And that's the truth."

Margaret came back from seeing him off with a smile on her lips. She threw herself into a chair and blew smoke wreaths from her mouth, her eye-corner folds a-twinkle like the spokes of a celestial, but diminutive, cart-wheel.

At last there came a bang at the door and a lugubrious man's voice, saying:

"Do come and tell me what you think. The damned thing won't come right—no how."

It was the bearded, ruffianly-looking painter upstairs, and at the end of an evening spent in comforting a pal, Margaret tumbled, too tired to think, into bed. The caretaker's baby was wailing below.

"Ah, the blessed bambino," cried she, screwing up her face at the night-light. "That's the worst of it. But I'll have one. Why not? As sure as the Lord sends the women, and the devil, the men, I will. For, in the words of Genefer Rosdew, if the tree doesn't drop its apples, you must shake it. I will."

And she did. Quite respectably, too, for she found a verminous little beast whom the good Breton fisher-folk had taught to sing "*Vive l'amour: Vive le vin,*" at the age of three. So *la petite* Amourette (Heaven save us!) became the *bébé* of the English mademoiselle.

But by the time he reached the bottom of Mademoiselle's stairs, Archer Bellew was laughing and congratulating himself on his luck. For these Englishwomen were terrible, so self-sufficient, so egotistic, so damnably up and down in their straightforward desire to make the most of their lives.

And far away over in Biskra there was the shadow of palm trees, the call of the muezzin, the midday rest; it lured him, that land, as home calls the wanderer. There, too, were beautiful, simple women, with adoration in their eyes. Were he but free, he would settle there.

And soon he was free.

CHAPTER XVIII

EPITHALAMIUM: IN THIS HEAVEN LIGHTS THE TORCHES OF THE SKY

Between huge slabs of granite overgrown with moss and fern grew stunted oaks, their gnarled and knotted trunks half hidden with carpeting of whort-bushes. In the warm, scented wind the tree branches waved above the woodland gloom that was dappled with points of gold. Everywhere was light and movement, thrilling upwards from the breast of earth towards the sun's caress. A single robin's note floated through the heat and light, its sweet loneliness the very spirit of the waste.

For the oak wood is at the foot of Black Tor, looking towards the valley where the West Okement slips by sand-edged pools and rushing falls between a gorge buried deep in mountain-ash and purple heather. At the head is the wild moor towards Great Kneeset with its dun stretches of ling, a mantle of brown fur, broken here and there by solitary thorn bushes white with bloom and odorous with heavy scent. Lonely points that catch the eye and offer harbourage for the grey cuckoos of this June time, they speak, even now, of winds and suns, of beating rains and the scurry of the snow in the long winter nights.

Sara sat outside the wood; at her feet was a moorland pool, brown with peat and yellow with the glinting gold of a reflected gorse bush. Behind her, in the tent doorway, lay a long blue-grey boar-hound, its sharp pointed snout resting on delicate, arching feet.

The day advanced; over Amicombe the sun spread a delicate golden green, turning the hill into a dark shadow along which the creeping clouds passed like a breath. Between a mass of boulders, a ewe sheltered with her lambs. On the sky-line a cropping horse seemed cut in bronze. Against the sheltering bastion of the hill the wind broke and rebounded like the sea tearing at a cliff.

Soon the noises of the night began; the river rose and fell like a vast in-breathing and out-breathing. Daylight and starlight met. A hawk, flying over the moor, passed so close that the oarage of its wings was plainly audible. From side to side of the valley the night-jars answered one another, while the purple darkness of the valley rose higher and higher, up past the hillside, to the star-strewn dome above.

Then there came an unwonted sound; the dog growled, pricked his ears. It was the noise made by a steel-point that strikes a rock. Sara, rising, stood with her hand on the dog's collar. It was sweet in that solitude to feel the bristling muscles of his neck. Her keen sight, used to the dimness, discerned a moving point among the boulders. It was a man climbing over the hill by the help of an alpen-stock. She turned back to the tent and lit the lamp that its rays might guide the leaping, goat-like figure to the wood. Outside in the stillness she could hear the wind along the moor and the stealthy rustle of snake or stoat gliding through the bracken. But deeper than all was the sound of her racing blood that not even [the wind could cool. Bare-footed, she clung to the ground, as though the whirling ball beneath her feet claimed a surer clasp.

For a moment he stood in the zone of light from the tent door. Sparkles of fire seemed to pass from his eyes to hers. He must have gone to Mrs. Bodinar for direction; her cottage deep in black dust and "all of a caddle" came back to Sara. She smiled at the recollection with sudden gaiety.

She was astonished at the homely feeling brought by the touch of his arms, for all the tender memories of a lifetime seemed gathered there: the sudden sight of a little rag doll that Anne and she had played with as children had brought the same sensation.

"My dear, my dear," she cried, and laughing, rejoiced in his strength as he lifted her face to his. The dog sniffed cautiously, licked their hands and gravely followed them up the pathway of light to the tent door.

Every sound was very distant now; mouse and bird were silent, only the rising and falling of the river seemed like the breathing of the earth. Low and white against the darkness of the wood shone the little tent.

"Are you sure?" asked she, turning back to him.

"Sure," answered he and lifted her over the threshold. Then, seeing a trouble in her eyes, he asked:

"Sara, what is it, tell me?"

"We must pay, you know," she answered. "Shall you mind? For what they may say to—our children of their mother?"

"Should I be here, if I minded?" he asked.

And she bowed her head, for like a wonderful tree of life, their mutual trust in each other's honour bore but their love and passion as a flower.

"He will free us, will he not?" he asked.

"Yes," she said quietly.

Then Anne's thought came for, after all, this road they had to tread was in the eyes of most but a muddy track.

"This," she said brokenly, "that to us is glorious—and to so many, but a shame."

He was silent. Then he said at last:

"But, we have not failed them, those others."

"They will say so," she answered.

"But," he held her hands and looking down on her, asked: "Cannot we two, at any rate, look below the shows?"

It is to be hoped that they could; for to look below was, as they very well knew, their sole justification.

All the while the dog lay across the doorway, clasping in his delicate, long-nailed forefeet a bone he had stored in the bracken. He held it upright and sucked it at intervals as one may take pulls at an empty pipe. Then he leapt to his feet, for Sara had come to the door. There held by Billy's encircling arm, she stood looking out; the Milky Way, a cross of starry gauze, lay low across their home. It had lain across Craneham that night when Archer spoke. The moor-wind sighed along the waste.

Boris also sighed, for supper in those days was nothing accounted of. Surely the Signor Guarini, in handing him over to a woman, had never contemplated this weary endurance of an empty belly? Then, at last, the humans remembered, the joyful clatter of plates began and the hound recovered his spirits.

Hours later, he got up, stretched, lay down again and watched the night fade. It was the time when sleeping beast and bird turn in their rest, the one hour in the twenty-four when the onward rush of the earth through space may be felt. In the pale primrose of the sky the stars were fading; from the horizon pulsing waves of colour poured into the valleys. The black shadows which had crouched beneath the sky all night were, after all, but marking the presence of the Eternal Hills.

For the dawn was at hand.

THE END

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